

Sermon – John 1:1-14  
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Grace Lutheran Church  
Christmas – Year B  
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### “A Happy Exchange”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Well, if gift giving is part of your tradition, at this point I imagine you’ve given and received most of the gifts that will be exchanged this Christmas. So, get any stinkers that you need to get rid of? Exchange? Regift? Send back? Don’t worry, no need for a show of hands. After all, the person who gave you that unwanted gift might be sitting right next to you or watching online. No, best to dispose of unwanted gifts quietly, on the down low. Hopefully there was a gift receipt included, which grants implicit permission to just go ahead and exchange that ill-given gift for something you actually want. By the way, to my family, on the off chance you’re watching from home, no I’m not referring to anything I received this year. It was all perfect!
2. Last night, we gathered in this room to welcome and worship Jesus Christ, the newborn King. Are we having second thoughts today? After last night’s familiar telling of the birth of Jesus from Luke’s Gospel, with shepherds and angels and mother Mary, John’s Christmas narrative seems to indicate that maybe we don’t want the gift after all. Is there a gift receipt in that manger? John writes, “He came to what was his own, and his own did not accept him.” Jesus, God-with-us Emmanuel, bringing peace on earth and the goodwill of God? You know, a nice sweater would’ve been just fine.

3. In the light of Christmas Day, we can see that not much has changed. Our world is shot through with violence. Bombs fall in the land once controlled by Herods and Caesars. Fascism rears its ugly head. Sin and death are not willingly abdicating their thrones. There was no room for Joseph and Mary in the inn, no worldwide welcome for the Savior. There seems, perhaps, to be little room for Jesus today.
4. Of course, the Son of God knew this going in. As John so beautifully tells us, the baby Jesus is also the Word that was with God in the beginning, the Word that is, and always has been, God. This Word, bound up now in our flesh, in everything that it means to be human, in all the vicissitudes of mortal existence, enters into a creation that has long since turned its back on the Creator. This Jesus always knew he was a gift unwanted. His life was cruciform from the start, and he was crucified at the end.
5. We seem to be stuck in the darkness, as if we insist on living without the light. Have you ever been in true darkness, the kind you can't find in the city, the sort of deep darkness in which there is not even the hint of light reflected from elsewhere? I was recently reading through old issues of *Pulpit Digest*, because clearly my life is very interesting. I ran across a story by Bob Woods. He tells the story of a couple who took their daughter and son to Carlsbad Caverns National Park. Upon reaching the lowest point underground, the tour guide turned off the lights. Enveloped in deep darkness, the son began to cry. But in the dark came a word. His sister spoke: "Don't cry. Someone here knows how to turn on the lights."
6. The story begins in darkness. All beginnings, as noted by the rabbi and novelist Chaim Potok, are hard. In the beginning, God confronted chaos and darkness. But through the Word proclaimed and the brooding of the Spirit, God's purpose came to pass. When a new beginning was needed, God's Word took on flesh. In the vulnerability of birth, Jesus brought grace and truth into

this world once more. In the vulnerability of life, Jesus endured death, that death would no longer be the end. Beginnings are hard, but once started, the story of Christ and the salvation he wins for us will not be thwarted. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it. God knows how to turn on the lights. So come, Christians, as Bach's cantata calls us. Come, and engrave this day. Come, and hurry to the manger. Come, for the beam that there breaks in, appears to you as the light of grace. Come and adore him, Christ the Lord.

7. The world may not have received him. But to those that Jesus gives the grace and the power to receive and believe, we are gifted to become children of God. He may not have been the gift we were hoping to receive. But he will not be returned, and he will not turn away from you. He The crucified Christ is the risen Lord as God doubles down on the power and promise of Christmas. Even now, the Word become flesh lives among us. Even now, we see his glory, the glory as of a father's only son. Even now, we live in God's grace and truth. The world still resists. But God will not be turned back. In the happiest exchange of all, Christ has taken on our sin and gifted us with his righteousness. The light still shines and will not be overcome. Christ is born, Emmanuel. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.