**First Reading Jeremiah 31:7-14**

*God promises to bring Israel back to its land from the most remote parts of exile. In Zion Israel will rejoice over God’s gift of food and livestock. Young women will express their joy in dancing; God will give gladness instead of sorrow.*

7  Thus says the Lord: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, “Save, O Lord, your people, the remnant of Israel.” 8  See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. 9 With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. 10 Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, “He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.” 11 For the Lord has ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. 12 They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. 13 Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them and give them gladness for sorrow. 14 I will give the priests their fill of fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the Lord.

**Psalm 147:12-20**

12 Worship the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion, 13 who has strengthened the bars | of your gates and has blessed your children within you. 14 God has established peace on your borders and satisfies you with the finest wheat. 15 God sends out a command to the earth, a word that runs very swiftly. 16 God gives snow like wool, scattering frost like ashes. 17 God scatters hail like breadcrumbs. Who can stand against God’s cold? 18 The Lord sends forth the word and melts them; the wind blows, and the waters flow. 19 God declares the word to Jacob, statutes and judgments to Israel. 20 The Lord has not done so to any other nation; they do not know God’s judgments. Hallelujah!

**Second Reading Ephesians 1:3-14**

*In Jesus, all of God’s plans and purposes have been made know as heaven and earth are united in Christ. Through Jesus, we have been chosen as God’s children and have been promised eternal salvation.*

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. 5 He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight 9 he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11 In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, 12 so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; 14 this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory.

**Gospel John1:1-18**

*John begins his gospel with this prologue: a hymn to the Word through whom all things were created. This Word became flesh and brought grace and truth to the world.*

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not

know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth. 15 John testified to him and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ ” 16 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.

**Sermon**

 Happy 2025 everyone! A few weeks ago, the church calendar changed over from Year B, the year of Mark, to Year C, the year of Luke. Now our daily calendars have changed from 2024 to 2025. I realize that it is THIS calendar change, rather than the church calendar change, that gives us all a feeling of newness and hope, a feeling that we are starting over with a clean slate. Some of us may have set some resolutions or intentions or goals for the new year. You may even be hoping that today’s sermon has some sort of wisdom or encouragement to start the year off right. Well…we’ll see.

 Today is also the 2nd Sunday of the Christmas season. So Merry Christmas still! We don’t often get 2 Sundays in the Christmas season. But here we are, and to help us continue in the Christmas spirit we have the passage from the beginning of John’s gospel, a passage called the Prologue. We actually heard this passage a few Sundays ago as the final lesson of Lessons and Carols. I also used selected verses from John 1 at the Blue Christmas service. But here we have it to continue our celebration of the birth of Christ. And once again, we have a gospel writer who gives yet another perspective on who Jesus is based on how he began his gospel.

 I would describe this as a step back to seeing a bigger picture. There is no human mother and father in the story. There is no birthplace named. There are no manger or angels or shepherds. And yet this Prologue, this poem, tells us a lot about Jesus, about what we need to know about Jesus as we read the rest of the gospel of John, which you’ll have to do on your own because we will be in the gospel of Luke next week. Through a close and careful read of

this passage, we could find themes that are woven throughout the entire gospel. But that would take a lot longer than 10-12 minutes!

 Today I’m going to lift up 2 themes to have us keep in mind whenever we read the gospel of John that are important truths to usher us into a new year. The first one is a tie-in for those who have been part of the Leviticus study this Fall. And it is verse 14, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us…” I know I’ve mentioned this verse a number of times before. First of all, we need to know what is meant by “the Word.” “The Word” is described earlier in the passage and what we know about “the Word” is that it was in the beginning with God, it was God, and all things came into being through him. The best way to understand “the Word” is, every time God spoke, and something was created, that which God spoke is “the Word.” The Word had no body, until the Word became flesh and lived among us.

 The literal word or words that I want to focus on in verse 14 are, “lived among us.” There are a few ways that Greek word *meno* could have been translated. It could be translated lived, it could be translated remained or it could be translated tabernacled. Hopefully the idea that The Word would “tabernacle” among us rings a bell in the minds of those from the Leviticus study. In the final chapters of Exodus, God gives the people of Israel instructions for building a tabernacle and the purpose of the tabernacle is to be the place where God can reside or live in the midst of God’s people. Verse 14 is intended to give us a vision of God, through Jesus the Word, residing once again in the midst of God’s people. But this God who is tabernacling among humanity in Jesus will move freely in the midst of the people rather than being contained to one location. There will be no priests who intercede on behalf of the people…the Word, who takes on flesh will interact with human beings wherever they are at.

 I have often said that Christmas is not only a time to remember an event that happened in the distant past. Christmas is a time to be in awe of the surprising ways that God’s presence continues to be born among us, a time to be aware that God’s presence, once born into this world in Jesus has never left this world and has forever changed it. The creative Word of God is alive here in our midst. What is the Word creating in our world now? In our lives, in the lives of our neighbors today?

 One of the themes that come up throughout the gospel of John is the theme of life. Here, in v. 3-4 the writer says, “What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the

light of all people.” Remember that it is in John 3:16 that Jesus speaks of having eternal life. In John 6, the Bread of Life Discourse, which we had last August, Jesus speaks of having true life. Toward the end of the gospel of John, the writer says, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may *have life* in his name.”

 The “life” Jesus offers and speaks of throughout this gospel isn’t just walking/talking/breathing life, nor is it life after death. It isn’t a reference to getting everything we want in life nor having an easy life. The life that Jesus offers is life lived in relationship with God here and now while God, through Christ, is tabernacling in our midst. Jesus comes for humanity to have the relationship with God that he has with God. Through relationship with God, we will receive love and grace that allows us to live as children of God. We will know that we are never alone, that God will not abandon us no matter what happens, and that we can talk to God about what is happening and expect God’s response and guidance.

Relationship with God creates a whole different dimension to life as we become aware of the tangible grace and love that is alive in our midst. Being aware of the presence of God tabernacling among us helps us to orient ourselves toward others with grace and love, even to deal with ourselves and our shortcomings with more grace and love. God is with us in the midst of the challenges that will come our way this year. The most important thing for us to remember as we begin this new year is that God’s creative Word is with us, is working and creating in and around us and that is true beyond what we do or control. This year will bring what it will bring AND it will be full of God’s grace and love and life. Amen.