

**A Brief Meditation and Introduction to the Christmas Cantata composed by Bruce Moser
based John 1:1-14, Matthew 1:20-22, Luke 1:30-38, 46-50, Luke 2:10-14, and Matthew 28:5-6
Delivered by Pastor Drew Mangione on December 22, 2024, at Shelby Presbyterian Church**

[The sermon this week was provided by an original cantata composed by choir director Bruce Moser, which we strongly suggest you find some way to view on YouTube or Facebook this week.]

Today we have a special opportunity to reflect on the message of Christmas through music. Today's cantata was composed by our own Bruce Moser, and is presented by our choir, with Emily and Sherry, and our special guests Justin and Stephanie Gray, as soloists.

In this four-part piece, they will bring us from the beginning – from creation – using the words of John's prologue and then move us into the wonder, the fear, and the strange reality of the virgin birth. Then they will bring us to Mary's song, where she realizes the magnitude of a personal God – a God now embodied by the Holy Spirit within her.

The closing is the proclamation of the angels – first to the Shepherds on that first night, and then to the women at the tomb after the resurrection, on the dawn of a new day. This is the beauty of the story of scripture that we sometimes miss. Apart from the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, the history, literature, and poetry of the ancient world always centered on the greatness of the gods, heroes, and nobles. They ridiculed the common person, especially women and children.

This is why the world did not recognize God in Jesus for who he truly was as God's Word. This word, "logos" in Greek thought at the time, meant by "word," the reason behind the universe, the animating reality of all things, by which the world is ordered. To say that this Word became flesh and dwelled, or pitched his tent, among us, was offensive. We are so used to hearing it, we don't realize that. That is how much the world has changed.

It is said that only incomplete revolutions are remembered, because the things that cause complete change just become part of life. This is how it is with the changes that came from Christ's birth, death, resurrection and ascension. We don't even notice the change. This idea of the Word becoming flesh to be a baby in a manger, growing up to be homeless, then crucified and risen from the dead was a scandalous proposition.

This cantata takes us through that where the one and only – the only begotten from the Father – who is full of grace and truth, embodying grace and truth for us. In and through him, all people, not just heroes or nobles, but all people become children of the One True God.

And so the angels appeared to workers in the fields, making them the first to be told of the birth of the new king, and on the morning of the third day, the angel told the women of the king's resurrection, marking the beginning of a new creation, and the first born of this new creation.

So, as you meditate on these words set to music you have not heard, imagine the wonder the first hearers of the gospel would have felt as they received these words. They were hearing the story of a humble God reaching humble people, and it was a new kind of story – a story that would change the world. Amen.