My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Eternal God of our Christmastide bodies, minds, hearts and spirits, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in Your sight. Our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

 Our texts today are a contrast, aren’t they? One of them is probably totally unfamiliar, being from that collection of books called the “Apocrypha”. The other we have heard at the end of each Lessons and Carols service on Christmas eve since we were knee high to a grasshopper.

But both of them share a commonality that we can, and should, identify with in this second Sunday of Christmas. Both speak to that time before the world unfolded. Perhaps when God was…well, maybe not knee high to a grasshopper, but younger than when our earth was created 4.3B years ago.

And it can be kind of tough to understand what John is saying here, too, because in all the other Gospels there is this sense of an unfolding story, events and people moving from here to there to thither and yon. But in these opening verses, John is writing theologically. Do we remember what that means? It means to speak in a way that gives meaning to God, the nature of God, of faith seeking understanding.

Sirach makes it no less difficult to understand, right? Lady Wisdom speaks to us, that her people are the Heavenly Council, and just like the Word, she seems to say that she is a part of God and may even be the Holy Spirit that is spoken of in Genesis, the Spirit which was hovering over the waters, before there was light. Such are the images of theological utterings. Ones that inspire awe and reverence.

Hope that happened to you out there? Yeah? Well, then, it worked. Because these theological utterings are trying to get us to give vision and meaning to a concept that is central to God, as central as love, but it’s not love exactly. Oh, heck, now I’m doin’ it! Okay, these scriptures are trying to get us to consider the varied meanings of “GRACE”.

But instead of associating words that try and hem in the wonderfulness of something, these scriptures speak to images. They want us to put in our minds, or imagine (which is the active verb of the word ‘image’ after all) what grace might look like. A skater gliding across the ice. A gymnast or dancer defining a perfect line with arm and leg outstretched. Hands folded around a table while lips and hearts give thanks for God’s providence.

For what happened on Christmas is that God’s grace was not ever again going to be something that we had to conceptualize—God’s grace became real, right here, in the world. That’s what happens when John’s Gospel says, “and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”. We have yet another theological term for grace coming into the world. It’s called “the Incarnation”. It’s not just for Catholics anymore, by the way. Incarnation literally means In (in), flesh (carne), tion (a word ending which allows us to grammatically turn verbs into a noun). The timeless entered time. The Word became flesh.

Let’s think back to first century Palestine. This fella, Jesus had been teaching, healing, and then said some stuff to the wrong dudes who killed him for it. And folks knew that he was special. But they didn’t know why. It was so hard to define, so hard to explain, that when the other three Gospels were written from 70-110 they kept dancing around it but couldn’t get it across to people to make it real.

Then comes this little sect off in the desert that lives kind of humbly and isolates themselves, kind of like the Amish of their time, and they give us this imagery. That the central theme of their understanding of the life and times of Jesus is that there is a cosmic and theological claim to God’s child that is unmistakable and has to be proclaimed. This was not just a fella with remarkable understanding of God and the scriptures. Jesus, the person known to humankind, was the Logos: The Word. The Truth. And the implication of this claim is clear and way more radical than the other Gospels. The pre-existent Truth, who is God, Wisdom, and Spirit all in one, became concrete and real.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Alright. Now as you’ve gotten to know me as your Pastor it’s that time again, isn’t it? What does this have to do with me, Pastor Mark, and what are you talking about?

Well, it’s the images. I’m trying to get us to get past the incomprehensible theology and to say this: we need symbols of grace to help us clear the hurdles these texts present. In other words, in what ways are the truth, the Word, the Logos fleshed out not just in the events of the Bible—though that might be a good parlor game some time when you’re around the table with nothing to do—But in what ways are God’s grace fleshed out, or “Incarnated”, in your own spiritual experience? Life experience? Witnessed experience?

You see, God’s grace isn’t something that is just internalized and then forgotten, like battle formations of Napoleon’s victory at Austerlitz. Remember that? Noooo, of course not. God’s grace is bigger than any historical artifact. It’s real, it’s here, it’s near, and when we can think of a God’s grace moment, or for short, let’s call them “God moments”, these things change a person. They are big things. They gnaw on us until we say, “yup, can’t explain that one”. And many of us drop it after that. But it still gnaws on us til the next one happens. And when enough of these come around, that’s when God says, “OK, now I’ve got your attention. Let’s take that uncertainty and do something about it. There’s a nice group of folks up the road at Community Congregational Church of Greenland who have all been through what you’re getting gnawed at. Go and have a chat with those nice folk.”

It’s true. It happens like that. I was born into the faith fair enough, because my Mom was from the Swedish Evangelical Church and my Dad was from the German Reformed, and when they married and the UCC combined those two denominations with the Congregationalists, well then you got baptized and bingo. God was with you.

Until life happens. And God seems further away. Huh.

And if we remain in our childlike understanding of God, we may keep God distant because he can’t fulfil our wants. Like make the Red Sox have good pitching again. Or give us money when we need want it for stuff. Or make our kids behave. Or keep our loved ones from dying of heart attacks, cancer, strokes, or Alzheimers.

But there’s a bunch of us who start to see God moments and get that gnawing feeling that there’s more to it. But we don’t know what it is.

I’ll leave you with these final words.

It’s God’s grace, is what it is. Working on us, with us, because the Truth and the Word made Flesh is in the very image in which we were created. The hard part for us—the ones who have been through it—is asking ourselves the hardest question of all. How do we communicate, without ornate stained glass windows imaging the stories and God’s grace—how does our congregation and gathered community tell the wider community how to see and even TOUCH God’s grace? How do we do that, in a world which says we should stay distant, now until…we don’t know? Our very survival as a people, much less a church, may depend on finding a way. Christ is come indeed. Thanks be to God, Amen.