

Pastor Jim Lloyd

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Title: THE MOST INCREDIBLE JOURNEY EVER

Text: John 1:1-5, 14

This is my 25th Christmas season preaching here. That's a lot of Christmas sermons. During those years we've looked at the Christmas account from a variety of perspectives – Mary's perspective, Joseph's perspective, the angel's perspective, the shepherd's perspective, the Wisemen's perspective and I may have even considered Herod's perspective. I first thought to entitle the message "The Christmas Journey." Whose journey do you think we might be speaking of? The shepherd's journey from the fields near Bethlehem, OR the wisemen's journey to Jerusalem, OR Mary & Joseph's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Not!

I have taken a few journeys in my lifetime. I have been on a couple cruises. They took me to Haiti, Dominican Republic, Bermuda, Bahamas, St. Thomas, but... Multitudes have taken such a journey. I've been to the Holy Land. We made stops at Jericho, Galilee, took a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee, had communion in the Upper Room, visited Masada and floated on the Dead Sea, but... Millions have taken that journey, too. By the way, what is a JOURNEY? Webster defines a journey as travel from one place to another. A journey has a starting place and an ending place. A journey is getting from Point A to Point B.

My life journey began in Martinsburg, about 12 miles from here, and my life journey continues. There have been some significant things that have happened over my 60+ years on earth. In the 50s, ROSA PARKS got on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and refused to surrender her seat to a white passenger and launched the Civil Rights movements. In the 60s PRESIDENT JOHN KENNEDY went for a ride in an open, black Lincoln Continental and was assassinated. In the 70s hundreds of thousands of Americans made the journey across the Pacific Ocean to the controversial conflict in VIETNAM. Then there was the COLLAPSE OF THE TWIN TOWERS and a host of other acts of terror and not so terribly long ago a President of ours recognized JERUSALEM AS BEING THE CAPTIAL OF ISRAEL and announced the relocation of the U.S. Embassy. We continue to watch the conflicts in the Middle East. ISRAEL continues to be a center point of our world's daily news. In recent years we endured a PANDEMIC unlike anything I have ever seen. These were and continue to play a part in the journeys of many people. These journeys are significant events that have affected and continue to affect the course of history. NEIL ARMSTRONG may have made one of mankind's longest journeys on July 21, 1969, when he walked on the moon, BUT... That journey was ONLY 238,900 miles. Rather than title today's message as "The Christmas Journey," I've entitled it "The MOST Incredible Journey EVER."

This morning we will be looking at the JOURNEY OF JESUS. It was a one-of-a-kind journey. No one else has ever taken such a journey. It's not a journey we can take by following a GPS, AND... To think He didn't take this journey for His own well-being, pleasure, or benefit. JESUS TOOK THIS JOURNEY FOR US. It's a journey that started in Heaven and continued to earth. This Christmas Journey is the GREATEST journey EVER – the journey from HEAVEN to EARTH, from HEAVEN to BETHLEHEM. Most of us know the story well in its earthly version, about Mary and Joseph, the angels, the shepherds, and wisemen. Many can tell the story by heart. BUT... This morning I'd like to read to you the same Christmas story, NOT the earthly version but the HEAVENLY version. First let's watch a children's version of such. (Here Pastor Jim showed a video clip entitled "Unexpected Christmas – Kid's Version" – it was so cute and so well done. If you have the capability, you should go to YouTube and watch it.)

Gospel of John 1 – ¹*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made. Without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it..."* [And in verse 14] *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father full of grace and truth."* There you have it. That is the God's-eye view of Christmas describing the most amazing journey ever taken. In a

matter of speaking, it seems too good to be true. It was the Christmas journey, the journey from heaven to earth.

1. Jesus journeyed from HEAVEN to EARTH. It says, "In the beginning was the Word." "Word" is a nickname for the Son of God. It is the Greek term *logos*, and it refers to the Son of God, who as the Word lived forever in heaven. To be accurate, I also need to say that the Son of God, as the Word, designed heaven. He created it. He built heaven. John 1:3 says that *"through him all things were made"* – including heaven – *"Without him nothing was made that has been made."* So, heaven was His home. He owned it. It was His perfect place, a place of satisfaction with the best of everything, more magnificent than all the stars on a cloudless night, more magnificent than the most beautiful sunrise or sunset you have ever seen, more magnificent than the most beautiful music you have ever heard, happier than the happiest days that any of us have ever experienced. THAT was home for Jesus, BUT... The Christmas journey brought Him FROM there TO here. *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."* God the Son moved to OUR world. He was born in one of OUR villages, in one of OUR stables. He was born to one of OUR women, right here on OUR planet – earth. I struggle to comprehend the contrast between heaven and earth. The Bible says – EYE hath not seen – nor EAR heard what is prepared for the believer. Heaven is INDESCRIBABLE because we've nothing here to adequately compare it to. There we'll enjoy the PRESENCE OF GOD Himself. There will be the ABSENCE OF SIN and its effects. There we'll live in a house NOT MADE WITH HANDS. Have you ever asked yourself the question – if you had the option to live anywhere at all – where would you live? Anyone? I simply don't know. As I've aged, I've become a little more like my dad. He was a homebody. We really never traveled much growing up. Dad would say, "Why pay money and travel to someplace when there is just no place like home?" Wherein I don't know where I would choose to live, if I were given the option apart from Heaven, I do know several places where I would NOT want to live. It is my understanding that in several countries there are GARBAGE DUMPS that people live in. The largest such garbage dump is in Mexico City. There, garbage trucks empty their loads of rotting meat, broken glass and used needles. You might see the bloated body of a recently born unwanted baby. Scavengers will tear a dead man's bloody clothes from his corpse, searching for any flash of jewelry. This is home to thousands of "trash people." They live in waste produced by 21 million people. When its residents need a pair of shoes or a school uniform, they scavenge through the garbage along with the rats. Hairless cats and packs of emaciated dogs hunt rats whose tunnels burrow through the hills of garbage, into cardboard shacks inhabited by children who know no world beyond the barbed wire fences that surround the dump. Another such dump is in Manila in the Philippines. On the dump in Manila there are tens of thousands of people who have made their homes there. Shacks are constructed out of the things other people have thrown away. Children are sent out early every morning to scavenge for food out of other people's garbage, so they can have family meals. People are born and grow up there on the garbage dump. Many have died there without ever going any place else, even in the city of Manila. It is an incredible thing. In my reading I became aware that there are Americans who also live on the garbage dump. They are American missionaries. These are Christians who have chosen to leave this country and go there to communicate the love of Jesus Christ to people who otherwise would never hear it or receive it. That is amazing to me. It amazes me that people would leave what they have to go and live on a garbage dump. AMAZING, but not so amazing as the journey from heaven to earth. Jesus, the Son of God made that journey, and he knew WHAT He was doing. He knew WHERE He was going. He knew WHAT the SACRIFICE would be. He journeyed from heaven to earth on a mission to save the human race. You see the earth and humanity He had created had gone terribly wrong. Sin had turned man against God and polluted the earth. What was once a paradise has become the fruit of sin and is no longer paradise. I would have understood if God would have cut His losses and forgotten about this human race and started over someplace else. BUT – He didn't and am I ever glad. God so loved the world and us in it that He sent His One and Only Son from HEAVEN TO EARTH. God journeyed from heaven to earth.

2. Jesus also journeyed from ETERNITY to TIME. It was a journey, a grand journey, but not only from heaven to earth but ALSO from ETERNITY TO TIME. For this heavenly telling of the Christmas story says that *"In the BEGINNING was the Word, and Word was WITH God, and the Word WAS God. He was with God in THE*

BEGINNING.” When? When was the beginning? Go back as far as you can possibly imagine. Can you imagine 2,000 years ago or 10,000 or how about ten million or a billion years ago or a trillion or a billion trillion years ago? No matter how far in our wildest imagination any of us can go back in time, the beginning was before that. In the beginning the Word was. He already lived and existed because He never began. Then He started this journey from eternity to time. He came to OUR calendars, to OUR clocks, to OUR way of marking time and organizing schedules. He counted birthdays and He spoke of the days of the week and He lived in terms of bedtime and get-up time and workdays and days off, I would think He may have felt terribly closed in – this Son of God who had forever ago lived in all of the expanses of an UNTIMED eternity. I would think He must have felt caged in by the clock. When He came into time, He fit into OUR schedules. He became part of OUR history. He came, in fact, at exactly the right time. Roman peace had brought nations under the rule of a single emperor. People could travel on the Roman roads. There was a common language, BUT... Even those outside the Roman Empire saw a star that moved across the sky from the east, and they too came. It was the very best of times for the Son to come, BUT... He came not only from eternity to time. He came, in a sense, to RESET the clocks of time. At one time our calendars were calculated by the reign of kings or queens. For example, a year could be called the “tenth year of the reign of a certain emperor,” but that is no longer true. TODAY calendars of the world are set in terms of the COMING OF THE SON OF GOD. Christians and Jews and Muslims and Buddhists and Hindus and heathen – EVERYBODY must set their calendars and clocks by the coming of the Son of God from eternity to time. I suspect what is true on earth is equally true in heaven. For while heaven may in the past have not had calendars and clocks as we think of them, even heaven must be reset in terms of the coming of the Son from heaven to earth, from eternity to time. Our calendars and clocks are now synchronized so that heaven is connected to earth and earth is forever connected to heaven. Our time has changed heaven and eternity by the coming of the Son, Jesus.

3. Jesus journeyed from SPIRIT to BODY. Perhaps the least understood part of this Christmas journey was the journey from spirit to body. John 1:14 says, *“The Word became flesh.”* **That is obviously to say that the Son of God, nicknamed the Word, was NOT previously flesh, was NOT previously human – that the eternal Son of God was A SPIRIT, and ONLY a spirit.** You couldn’t see Him. You couldn’t touch Him. No one could because there was nothing to see. There was no one to touch. He was invisible – invisible just as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit still are today, BUT... **Being invisible does not make anything or anyone LESS real.** And if any generation knows that, surely our generation does, because here in this room there is radiation. There are radio signals (Example: Projector Remote). There are television signals. We have wi-fi – it feeds into our phones, tablets, and computers. There are all kinds of things we know to be not only real but very powerful – even though we cannot physically touch, hold, or see them. **The eternal Son of God was INVISIBLE as a spirit.** He didn’t have a body forever ago, and He really didn’t have a name, at least not in the sense we think of a name. He may have been called Son, or He may have simply been called God, BUT... **When He embarked on this amazing CHRISTMAS journey, he gained BOTH a body AND a name, for He was GIVEN the name JESUS.** As I understand it up until that time, that was NOT His name. He was given a name that was not the least unusual. It is the Hebrew word for “Savior,” and it is my understanding that there were hundreds, thousands of Jewish boys and men who had the name Jesus. It was a common name. If you wanted to get lost in the crowd in Bethlehem or Nazareth or Jerusalem, Jesus was a good name to have because there were lots of people named Jesus. It was not the name that made Him special. Rather it was JESUS who made the name special. He gained not only a name but, far more important, he gained a BODY, a body He had never had before. The Son of God became limited by space. He became human – not at Christmas but at conception (nine months earlier). That is, then, to understand that this eternal, powerful Son of God left heaven and became contained in a microscopic human embryo. He had not yet formed eyes or hands or feet or brains. God was contained. In John chapter 1 He is described as THE LIGHT. Yet for nine months He was in total darkness. And when He was finally born on His birthday, He looked like any other human baby – six, seven, or eight pounds in weight, unable to feed Himself, with eyes slow to focus, hands not quite able to grasp, certainly unable to speak. I suppose He wore some form of diaper, totally dependent upon a recently married

couple for every necessity of life. Yet, HE WAS THE SON OF GOD. What an incredible journey that He became HUMAN, He took on a body FOR US in order to reach us, in order to communicate to us in OUR language in OUR way, in order to SAVE US from sin and death. This eternal Son of God came from spirit to body. Now, as astounding as THAT was, be even more astounded that this was not a TEMPORARY change. It is not that He took a body for the 33 years of His biography that we know from the four Gospels of the New Testament. Never think that the body was only for the one generation from Bethlehem's manger to Calvary's cross. This was permanent. God became human forever. There was no going back. The body that was conceived inside of Mary is the SAME BODY that was born those 9 months later. It was the SAME BODY that grew up in Egypt and in Nazareth. It is the SAME BODY that was crucified on the cross, the SAME BODY that was laid in the grave, the SAME BODY that rose back to life on Easter Sunday morning. It was the SAME BODY that ascended up into heaven and is there now. It is the SAME BODY that the Bible predicts, and Jesus promises, will come back to earth again. It is the SAME BODY He will wear forever and ever through all of eternity. Please, do not miss the wonder and amazement of this Christmas truth: that GOD BECAME HUMAN, that SPIRIT BECAME FLESH, not only that He came TO us, but that He BECAME ONE OF US FOREVER! What an amazing journey!

4. Jesus also journeyed from DEITY to HUMANITY. There is one more piece of this Christmas journey from God's point of view. It is the amazing reality that DEITY BECAME HUMANITY, and this has to be the most amazing part of the story. John 1:1 says, *"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word WAS God."* He WAS God, FULLY God, 100 PERCENT God. Everything that God is – all Powerful, all Present, anywhere, and everywhere at the same time, all Knowing, not a secret withheld from Him, God – Holy and Powerful, God Above Every God. AND... HE BECAME HUMAN! The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us so that with the name Jesus, the Son of God became fully human. He gained a human body with human organs, a human appearance, BUT... Even more than that, He felt human emotions – disappointment and delight, all the feelings we have. He had human thoughts structured the way our brain structures thoughts – as fully human as any and all of us. But here was the miracle: When He became HUMAN, He was NO LESS GOD! 100 percent God and 100 percent human at the same time. He is unique. He is absolutely ONE OF A KIND, and He did this so that He could become our Savior. In the simplest forms of arithmetic, we could figure out that ONE perfect man could, perhaps, pay for the sin, atone on the cross for ONE OTHER sinful person, but not for ALL of us. Unless, of course, somehow there could be a unique combining of that human's humanity and God's infinity. He was 100 percent human and 100 percent divine. Add to the arithmetic formula a multiplication factor of infinity so that when He died on the cross, He could die and pay for ALL our sin. JESUS was the perfect match to our eternal needs. When we speak to Jesus, we speak to God. When we experience Jesus, we experience God. When we see JESUS, we see GOD. And yet He is one of US, fully human, AND... God almighty, fully divine.

CONCLUSION. God journeyed to us to save us from our sins. The Christmas story is a story of journeys – It is the journey of MARY and JOSEPH from Nazareth to Bethlehem. It is the journey of the ANGELS from heaven to earth. It is the journey of the SHEPHERDS from the hills to the village of Bethlehem. It is the journey of the WISEMEN to see the infant King. But the greatest journey of all is the journey of the SON OF GOD – from heaven to earth, from eternity to time, from spirit to body, from deity to humanity. Oh, to be sure, enjoy the human side of Christmas that is familiar to us – the decorations, the season's festivities, the music and the celebration, the family gatherings, the giving and receiving of gifts. It's wonderful, BUT... Let us not forget GOD'S side of the Christmas story. *"God so love the world that HE gave HIS ONE and ONLY SON that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."* He came to us. Emmanuel – God WITH us. He came to save us from our sins. Accept Him. Be saved from your sins and let the purpose of the GREAT CHRISTMAS JOURNEY be fulfilled in you. Respond with heart and life and soul. Join your voice with the voices of heaven shouting, singing praises, hallelujahs to Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God, our Savior, and our Lord.