

## **Second Sunday of Christmas January 4 2026**

### **Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:[1-9] 10-18**

As humans, we love stories. *Stranger Things* packed the Marcus Theatres in Cedar Rapids for their series finale. The Marvel cinematic universe has made \$31 billion worldwide.

But it's not just that. We tell ourselves stories around this time of year. That everything can change- resolutions: I can be healthier, I can be stronger, I can learn this new skill.

That the Bears will win it all this year! That the Cubs will win the World Series!

The stories we tell ourselves about ourselves and our world do shape us. Studies show that these stories form us, our beliefs, our actions. In this way, stories are powerful. So, it is important that the stories we tell ourselves be the truth. Otherwise, we base ourselves, our world, on lies.

Words have power, then because they can create- If enough people say something is wrong, then that will create that impression on people, and they will react as if it is wrong. Whether it is or not.

What stories are shaping our lives- as followers of Jesus. As citizens of this nation? Are those stories the truth? Not even are they factual but are they the truth about our character as citizens of this nation? As followers of Jesus.

Paul, writes his letter to the Ephesians while imprisoned in Rome for being a Christian. He writes to encourage these believers, to tell them the story of Jesus- of who he is and what that means for us and our story.

Pastor and theologian NT Wright reminds us that Paul sees Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah promised to Israel. He sees those great stories in scripture rushing together in Jesus.

For a Jew in the first-century, the story that frames their lives is a single story going back to creation, but especially to Abraham and the Exodus. First-century Jews do not tell those old stories as abstract truths they can use to shape their own world; rather, it is a single story showing how the world has gone horribly wrong, and they are waiting for God to sort it out.

And Paul says that in Jesus God has done so. And that in him we have been caught up into this story as well. That this story is ours. A story that goes back to the creation of all that exists.

Paul's first chapter in Ephesians lays out the themes he will cover throughout the whole book.

First and foremost, we learn that this story is God's story brought forth by God's love. A story of God's creation, redemption, and fulfillment. A story that we are brought into as created beings, but also through our belief in Jesus Christ.

In Christ, God chose us to be part of God's fulfilling of God's redemption of this creation. Why did God choose us? For no other reason than that God loves us.

This part of the story seems the most ludicrous. Normally, people are chosen because of something they are or that they did. Even the "hidden" kings (Arthur, Luke Skywalker, Harry Potter) are what they are because of something they do or inherit. We are chosen just because- God loves us. Nothing more.

Paul tells us that in Jesus, in Christ we are caught up into God's story, into the very life of God. Look at the language he uses in the text. In Christ we are blessed, in Christ we are made children of God. In Christ, God's grace has been poured upon us, in Christ we have been bought back, redeemed, freed from sin, in Christ we have been made heirs of God's promise. To receive the new

creation that God brings to being in Jesus Christ. You hear the repetition? Who or what brings all of this? Jesus who is the Christ.

Paul reminds us that in Christ, we have heard the word of truth. The Word of the ultimate reality that exists in God. The true story of our lives and the life of the world. A word that is good news that frees us from sin, death, and all the forces that defy God. One that comes to us who were chose by God in the waters of baptism, who believe in his Son Jesus, and who have been sealed by the promise of the Holy Spirit.

God's story, God's Word- come to us in Jesus- is the truth. Later in his gospel, John will reflect on this through the interaction between Jesus and Pilate.

Here Jesus tells Pilate, "the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

Pilate, post-modern that he is, scoffs, "what is truth?"

But we know what truth is, because Jesus has said it earlier in the Gospel, Jesus is the truth. The one filled to overflowing with grace and truth. Who spills both everywhere. Who breaks

through the lies of the stories we tell ourselves. About who we are, what the world is, what we are called to do and be.

And the response of those who know the truth? To praise God. To verbally and publicly give God admiration, commendation, credit. To verbally and publicly tell the story of God. Our story. The story that everyone in the world is caught up in even if they don't know it.

A story of creation- wonderful- good as God put it.

A story of rupture- of Sin that tells a different story- one in which we humans are the star. A story of God's good creation gone off the rails. Leading to lots of casualties.

A story of God chasing God's beloved creation. Striving time and again to draw us back to God. Into God's story. The true story.

A story of how God has finally done that in Jesus. Through Jesus. Who is, John says, 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us', and Paul says is, 'God's plan is to sum up everything in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.'

This is the true story that we place before ourselves today, and tomorrow, and for all the tomorrows of 2026. That in Jesus we

have met the fullness of God. The God who created this world and all that exists. In Jesus we can know who God is. A God who does not desire to condemn the world. But to save it. Who has embodied God's love for us and for this world in Jesus and reached out to us.

To catch us in God's embrace. To pull us tight and say, you are mine. I love you.

Let us praise the God who is the author of our lives. Whose Word fills us with good things. And who in Jesus has written a happy ending better than any Hallmark Movie. For us and for all of creation.

Thanks be to God.