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The God Hunt
John 1:1-5, 10-14

CHRISTMAS EVE NIGHT:

Listen to these words of the Gospel of John, Chapter 1, about Jesus' entrance into this world: *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,*^[a] *and the life was the light of all people.* ⁵ *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.....* *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,*^[c] *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,*^[d] *full of grace and truth.*

(Night:) The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Let us pray.....

Our world bombards us with messages
about ***what we should be looking for***---especially at Christmas.

Lights, sights, and sounds of the season.

And then there are the bigger things,

like money, power, success, and security.

We're supposed to seek these things.

But as Christians we believe there is ***just ONE thing we really need,***

At any time of year.

One thing that will truly satisfy,

Nothing like money, power, success, or security.

The one thing is a PERSON---it's Jesus Christ,

our Savior born in Bethlehem.

The one the angels announced at his birth:

As the Good News of Great Joy for all people.

Sounds simple, but it's not.

Because we believe in something radical and extraordinary.

We believe that Jesus came into the world as a tiny baby,
as one of us----and not just one of us,
but a little vulnerable person, in need of care.

And that man grew, and ministered,
and died on the cross,

And was raised from death---all that we might have God's forgiveness,
and new and eternal life.

That's the Gospel.

Today, we believe that Jesus is STILL ALIVE.

Not as a child, but as the Holy Spirit, in our hearts.

And we believe that ***Jesus can be found all around us--***

In the lives of the least of these who are hurting and vulnerable.

In the faces of those we know and love, and in strangers we meet.

The question for us at Christmas is this:

Are we LOOKING for Jesus?

Are we looking for the Savior who became flesh and blood,
and lived among us, as it says in John 1?

Or as The Message Bible says—

the God who moved into our neighborhood?

If we want to find Jesus,

I believe we need to go on a "God Hunt".

Kind of like a "Where's Waldo?", but instead a: ***"Where's Jesus?"***

What if we went on a treasure hunt—for God
in our own hearts and lives?

Some people call this looking for ***God-sightings, or God-winks.***

But whatever you call it,

Here the awesome thing----in this treasure hunt,

the more you look,

The more you find

In fact, *just by looking for Jesus, you are guaranteed to find Him.*

And, when you start to become more aware of God's presence,

You find more **JOY** in life!

Who doesn't need that?

Sometimes *we wait until things are terrible* before we really look for God.

We, "Why is this happening to me?"

Or, "God, send me a sign!"

But what if we spent time looking for God, EVERY DAY?

What if we became so attuned to God's presence in our lives,

that we could ALWAYS see God's signs?

Well, here's good news—we can!

David Mains suggest that there are *four main ways to find God's presence:*

1. In answered *prayers*
2. In evidence of *God's care*
3. As we do *God's work*
4. And in things *we cannot explain*—like unusual timing or incidents.
Some call these coincidence, but they are really *God-incidents*.

If we look back at the Christmas story,

from the announcement to Mary to the shepherds coming to baby Jesus,

we see all of four of these things.

Jesus coming into the world as Messiah, the Savior,

was an *answer to the prayers* of God's people, over centuries!

Each time an angel visits, what are first words out of their mouths?

"Do not be afraid".

Evidence of God's care.

Mary faithfully carries the baby Jesus, conceived by the Holy Spirit.

And when the angel Gabriel announces her future,

she says *Here am I, servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word.*

In other words, Mary is *doing God's work*.

So were the wise men, when they followed the star to Jesus.

And talk about *unexplainable timing and events*.

Luke 1 says that Mary *was perplexed* by Gabriel's appearance,
and *pondered what sort of greeting this might be!*

So—what about YOU?

Where have *YOU seen God lately?*

Think about that for a moment....what are your God-sightings this season?

And, how can you *go on a God Hunt?*

It's actually pretty easy.

We just ask ourselves, *Where did I see God today?*

And as you look back over the past year—ask yourself:

Where did God act faithfully this year?

Where did God's presence bring me faith, over my fear?

One way to really help with a God-Hunt is to **WRITE it down**.

If you are a journal-keeper, include the God-sightings in your journal.

If you are not a writer, try jotting some down on *post-it notes or little pieces* of paper, and put them on your refrigerator, your bathroom mirror, your car dashboard, or your computer.

Another tool we discovered at the last women's retreat was to *set a daily alarm on your cell phone*, to remind you to pray, And look for God.

So many of the women still have a 12:30pm alarm going off on their phones every day!

So, what if we all leave this place,

Determined to look for God?

Determined to *keep our eyes and hearts open* to the presence of Jesus?

What if we took a break from everyday life,
and *hit pause on the negativity* of the world,
and *just soaked up the Good News of Great Joy?*

What if we *looked into the darkness* of this world,
for the great light of Jesus Christ?

I wonder, *where have you seen God's goodness?*
Where do you see the light of Christ shining?
Where do you see God's work in everyday life?
And what might you *need to leave behind*,
in order to truly find and worship our Savior?

Recently *I have seen God* in so many different places.
I always see Him in your faces, as you come forward for communion.
I saw Jesus as I said goodbye to Mike Riley.
And in the candles of our Blue Christmas service.
I see God in the Christmas music of worship.

Where have *You seen Jesus?*
Will you leave this place, and start looking?

Friends, hear the *Good News of the Gospel for you this Christmas:*
The more we look for Jesus,
The more we find Him!
Because God is always at work.
So, let's go on a God-Hunt.
And let Jesus bring JOY to our lives.
For this gift of Christmas, all God's people can say, Amen.