

Text: **John 1:1-14**. Christmas Day – **December 25, 2014**

Did you ever think you'd be in a hospital on Christmas Day? Well, we're glad you're here.

Welcome... to *GOD'S HOUSE*. Welcome... to the "*hospital for sinners*."

Like always, the Doctor is in, and he's ready and willing to heal.

BUT REALLY. *Why'd you come???* I'll repeat: It's Christmas Day!!!

Let's be honest, we ALL *might* like to be somewhere else right now! If each of us could draft our "Christmas morning itinerary," might it include: breakfast in bed, pajamas all day, pillow forts, a classic Christmas movie marathon, hot chocolate, a cookie or twenty – then just cycle all that good stuff on *repeat*. **BUT...** you're here. A place where you'll get none of that. Ok, maybe a few treats after the service, but... it's obvious, these chairs are not couches, the hymns we sing are not from the Elvis Christmas CD, and this sermon may be *right* during prime time for Christmas Day brunch – well, whaddya gonna do???

But somehow... your car found its way to Wesner Road – and this is significant! No coincidence there. And you walked inside this *church building* – not a restaurant, shopping mall, or movie theater – but a church. And praise the LORD! You and I realize there is something *different* about this place. Something that lasts. Take away all the decorations, the piano, all these chairs, **EVEN THE WALLS THEMSELVES...** and what's left? What remains? **The Word**. Here in this place – **the Word** God speaks to us. **The Word** God *SENDS* for us... on Christmas.

You're in the right place – **let Him PROVE it** to you. The function and purpose of this place remains the same. Whether it's summer time, Holy Week, Labor Day, or *Christmas Day*... church is still like one big **hospital**, built **SPECIAL** for you and me. Welcome... to the *Christmas hospital for sinners*.

I'll warn you... the hospital at *Christmastime* is a little crazier than at most times. It shouldn't be a surprise, but it is... patients' hearts are heavy and their spirits are sapped of life. It shouldn't be a surprise, but people's nerves may very well be at extremes right now – either off the charts or totally dulled. Some are *nervous*... nervous about family, about feelings, about ensuring good fun for everyone... while others, because they're so overly nervous and anxious, may even try to snuff out their senses with too much food, too much drink, and it's all just **TOO MUCH!** Yeah, you'd think *Christmas Day* is the most *carefree* day of the year – everybody's together, smiling, laughing, hoping. But for many, *Christmas Day* is just a special day to make everyday fears known, to argue about holiday procedure, to be afraid... and to wait around for some bad news. It shouldn't be a shock – Christmas has a lot of *ENEMIES*, a lot of forces acting against it, and a lot of nasty side-effects that we never really see coming.

That Christmas itinerary seems really silly now. The kids aren't fazed, but maybe for the rest of us, the adults who know a little too much, we say, "OK. Christmas time is here again." It shouldn't be a surprise if any *one* of us woke up this morning *just as grumpy* as any other day. Not a huge surprise if any of us are even a little more vexed than the average day off.

BUT... all things considered... we're still glad you're here! **ABSOLUTELY WE ARE!** Did you wake up with guilt? Or doubt? Fear? Apathy? In any case – by His grace – you knew what to do. **You rushed to the Christmas hospital! The place where God proves: HE IS FOR US!** The place where the Doctor gives you immediate and individual care. So here you are. The Christmas hospital's *GREAT*, because you know you'll walk away fully

rejuvenated to face the challenges of today, even those unique hurdles on Christmas Day. *God's* gifts are the *best*, because you know they are renewable and last forever. **They are his GRACE and TRUTH.**

So good to see you here today... and it's no coincidence! You didn't come for a quick fix or the placebo effect of "doing the right thing" on Christmas. Not to feel better about self. No – you came for ONE REASON. You came here because, rumor has it, there's another special in-patient. He's not quite like you, though. He's a newborn, and he's over in the maternity ward – actually, in a small pile of hay! He's a baby boy with flesh and blood, and there's something buzz-worthy going around this hospital today, and I'm telling you – it wasn't like this here last month or last week!

People are excited and just raving about the good Doctor who runs this place – and equally so concerning this baby boy! They're saying this little child was a ridiculous, never-seen-before MIRACLE, and it was all the Doctor's doing! How wonderful! But I will say – does this surprise us? We've come to expect this sort of thing from our good Doctor. This Good News on Christmas... *it's just more PROOF* ... that we can trust him with OUR health, our WEALTH – yes, our entire LIVES. While we are here, he will certainly make us well. Praise the LORD! – we are in the right place!

You know, *why wouldn't we come here on Christmas Day?!?* The *Christmas Hospital* has been in operation for our entire lives! Yours and mine. Follow me here. When you were born, you probably weren't born inside a *church*... but perhaps you were *born again* in a place like this! In baptism, God placed his own name on you and brought you into his own family, and he spoke then the very same **Word** he uses and administers now inside *these walls*, inside the *Christmas Hospital*. How about when you were—or will be—*married*? Why not here – in this place?!? Why not get married inside the *Christmas Hospital*? How beautiful and appropriate. God speaks his **Word** to seal off a Christian marriage in forgiveness and love. The very same **Word** that husband and wife promise each other for life is that **Word** of Christ, who loved the church and gave himself up for her. And it doesn't end there. Not even in death. Perhaps God's **Word** is strongest and most beautiful at yes... a Christian funeral. Yes, you likely won't die inside a *church*, but this is the place for God to speak his final **Word** of resurrection and peace. A completely sufficient **Word** of healing for God's people – who come HERE, to *this* place, to pay their respects.

You see, the *Christmas Hospital* is where it begins and ends! Even after this building is blown down, **the Word** that comes and dwells among mankind on *Christmas* will also come again to take us to live with Him. As one Christian confidently stated, "The incarnation is proof that God is not against us." He is all FOR US. Full of *grace* and *truth*. And his grace and truth covers over each of us, regardless of age or health or wealth or current status in life. From birth to youth to married life – to single life – even 'til the point of death. Young children can keep their innocent excitement on Christmas morning. Adults and parents who are suddenly full of worry and fear can fill up with God's *grace* and *truth*. The old and infirm can find refuge in the fact: on Christmas God himself is born anew, and he's born for you!

One final picture: the other night I was watching a favorite film of mine, the 1990 Christmas classic *HOME ALONE*. It's a comedy, so it's known for its two slapstick burglars, Harry & Marv, and of course, the main character, little Kevin who is left *home alone* after his family flies to Paris for Christmas. In the middle of all the hilarious hijinks, there's this peaceful, plaintive 5-minute scene about two-thirds of the way through. As Kevin is walking back home, thinking of what to do next, he wanders his way where... but inside an old church where a choir is rehearsing. And there Kevin has an unexpected conversation with his scary neighbor guy, an old fellow known as "Old Man Marley." The old man walks over, sits down next to Kevin, eventually asks him if he's been a good boy this year. First Kevin says, "Yeah," because he's so afraid, but a minute later, in typical

Kevin fashion: *“No, I’ve been kind of a pain lately.”* Then Mr. Marley says something interesting. He says, *“Well, this is the place to be if you’re feeling bad about yourself.”* Talking about AT CHURCH, of course. Mr. Marley is on to something... This scene is pivotal because Kevin, who’s feeling afraid, discovers that Mr. Marley is feeling even MORE afraid! Hard to believe, but true. Mr. Marley is alone *too*, but even worse, he hasn’t seen or spoken to his own son in years! And the poor old man defends himself by saying, *“You’re never too old to be afraid.”* In the end, they both offer each other encouragement. Mr. Marley urges Kevin to run along home, and Kevin urges his new friend to face his fears and talk to his son. It’s quite an emotional plot twist in an otherwise funny movie. Things resolve in the end, but you can’t help but think, *“There’s something missing.”*

Do you feel like Mr. Marley? Estranged from family or friends? Well, that’s why you came here. That’s why you came *HERE* today, to this hospital, to celebrate Christmas with a family stronger than bloodline and more lasting than this earth. If YOU are feeling *alone*, look around. You’re *NOT* alone. You are in the company of fellow in-patients at *the God-renowned Christmas hospital*. And just like you, they find here the cure for their souls. Even better than Kevin and Mr. Marley, you come here and you find **JESUS**, the real-live **Word made flesh**. That’s why you came to the hospital today, to once again meet the good and greatest Doctor of all time. You came here **to fill up with his grace and his truth. 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 – Amen.**