

September 14, 2025 Sunday Morning Service Sermon
"The Eternal Life That Has Appeared" Pastor Takaaki Inoue
1 John 1:1-4, John 1:1-3, 14-18

① 【The Background of the Letters of John】

This book was written around the year 100 AD, and its author is said to be the same person who wrote the Gospel of John. There are two theories regarding this John: whether he was the Apostle John, or the Elder John who led the church in Ephesus in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Since it was written about 60 years after Jesus' death, if it was the Apostle John, he would have been in his late eighties. Even if it was the Elder John, he would have been someone who saw Jesus with his own eyes.

The era of the apostles was a vibrant time of faith, filled with miraculous works and signs through the powerful working of the Holy Spirit. However, when Jerusalem fell to Rome in AD 70, the Jewish people were scattered throughout the world. Consequently, the center of the church shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch, Alexandria, Asia Minor, Greece, Rome, and other locations. As the first generation of believers who had witnessed Jesus and experienced miracles passed away, a new generation of believers who had never seen Jesus emerged. Then false teachers began introducing different teachings, different gospels, into the churches. Among these, the group called "Christian Gnosticism" had a particularly significant influence on Christianity. Gnosis means knowledge. They divided the God of the Old Testament, who created the weak, sinful flesh, into a lower-dimensional god, and the God of the New Testament, Christ, who saves the soul, into a higher-dimensional god. They taught that the body was impure and should be disregarded, that one should feel no guilt for sinning through the body, and that spiritual knowledge alone was important. This is spiritual-physical dualism. The Christ they taught was a phantom, for they claimed God would never accept a defiled body. This is called "Docetism." It denies the Incarnation. Judaism also denies God's incarnation. Furthermore, they taught that it was inconceivable for God to suffer. They taught that the Spirit of God-Chris dwelt in the human Jesus only from the time of his baptism until just before the cross, and that the Spirit departed before the cross. Thus, the one who suffered on the cross was merely the human Jesus. This is called "Adoptionism." It closely resembles the Christ taught by Islam. They deny that God experienced suffering and death. In this way, they distorted the teaching, the Gospel, handed down from the apostles, attempting to present a false Jesus.

② 【Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who truly appeared in history】

Knowing this background in which this letter was written helps us understand the meaning of the opening passage. Verses 1-4 are not written in the form of a letter

but as a sermon or exhortation circulated to the churches. Verse 1 begins with “What was from the beginning.” This ‘beginning’ closely resembles the opening of John’s Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This signifies that Christ is God who existed before the creation of all things. “What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.” This was written to guard against being deceived by docetism. Christ is not some illusion. I say I truly saw this One with my own eyes and touched Him with my own hands. In verse 2, it says, “This life was revealed. We have seen this eternal life, which was with the Father and was revealed to us, and we testify to it and proclaim it to you.” The Franciscan translation renders it as, “We have seen eternal life.” We did not see just a man. We saw eternal life—that is, God who is eternal—appeared as a man who took on flesh. God truly became human. This is the gospel the Church has always proclaimed. God truly suffered on the cross, experienced death, and rose again. This is Christianity. It is by confessing this that Christianity separated from Judaism. If it were merely the human Jesus, it would be Judaism or Islam.

● Previously, Reverend Takashi Yoshida, the president of Kobe Reformed Theological Seminary, said, “The Bible calls closeness happiness.” When I go to the nursery school, everyone gathers around, scrambling to climb onto my lap, clinging to my legs, trying to stick close. Do you know how the children sit in a circle? The nursery teacher says, “Okay, shoulders together!” Then the children sit neatly, snuggling up to the child next to them. If she says, “Hey, you’re too far apart!” they snuggle even closer.

We delight in physical affection. Sharing a meal together brings joy. Holding hands conveys warmth and brings comfort. Though Jesus could have healed with words alone, He touched the sick and healed them. The sick must have been overjoyed. Children were held in Jesus’ arms, and the disciples leaned against Him and embraced Him. God touched humanity, communed with humanity, and shared physical affection through Jesus’ flesh. For God to commune with humans, not just words, but rather the flesh is necessary. Even now, God, through priests, takes believers’ hands, anoints them with oil to heal, blesses them with the cross, enters deeply into people through the bread and wine of the Eucharist, becomes one with them, and raises them to new life. Precisely because Christ is fully human can this be imitated, and precisely because He is fully God can He heal my sin and death. Salvation is not found in mere humanity alone. That becomes mere morality. For us to be saved, we need to be touched not by mere humans, but by God. Even today, different images of Christ are emerging. I heard one candidate for the pastorate say, “The Bible doesn’t use the word ‘Trinity,’ so I don’t believe in the Trinity.” I think we are living in a very difficult time.

③ **[Wish for fellowship with the Church (Christ)]**

“We write these things to you so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” (1:3) Here, “us” refers to the church. It is a call to have fellowship with the church. Having fellowship with the church means having fellowship with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ at the same time. Not having fellowship with the church means not having fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus. Humans cannot have direct fellowship with God; we have fellowship with God through Christ and the church. The life of faith cannot be lived alone. The church is necessary. Reading the Bible alone leads to misunderstanding its meaning and strange interpretations, resulting in heresy. Neither the Lord's Supper nor baptism can be properly administered. The life of Christ resides within the sacred traditions of the church. The heretics—the false teachers spreading Gnostic Christianity—departed from the church in Ephesus. “Many antichrists have gone out among you... They did not go out from us, but they were not of us; If they had been of us, they would have remained with us.” (1 John 2:18-19) They rejected the traditional church, claiming they alone were true Christians and that they alone knew the true God, yet they refused to keep Christ's teachings. “Whoever says he knows God but does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” (1 John 2:4)

● In the second century, Cyprian wrote a treatise titled “On Church Unity,” in which he states: “Those who depart from the Church of Christ cannot receive Christ's reward. ... Those who do not have the Church as their mother cannot have God as their Father.” Also in the second century, Irenaeus wrote: “Within the Church is the communion of Christ, that is, immortality, true faith, and the Holy Spirit, the ladder to God. The Scriptures say that God has placed all the workings of the Holy Spirit within the Church. Those who do not gather in the Church cannot partake of this and do not partake of life. For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and all grace.” “The apostles gathered all things pertaining to truth into the Church, as into a storehouse, so that anyone who wills may receive the drink of life from the Church. This Church is the entrance to life; all others are thieves and robbers.”

We attend church regularly as a matter of course, but this church—this unique, mysterious flock created by God—is the image of Christ, the treasury of every blessing He possesses, and the place where these blessings are shared with us. The church is a heavenly place manifested in this world to bring us into encounter with God and to accustom us to Him. I earnestly hope you will treasure your fellowship with this church.