

**The Nativity of Our Lord – Christmas Day**  
**December 25, 2011**  
**John 1:14**

*“A Sure Foundation for Christmas”*

Does anyone remember what happened just about four months ago on August 23 of this year? That’s when we experienced a 5.8 magnitude earthquake here on the east coast, followed shortly thereafter by Hurricane Irene in less than a week, and then Tropical Storm Lee in early September that dumped 1000-year record amounts of rain on our area. The National Cathedral sustained quite a bit of damage from that earthquake, and was closed for several months while repairs were being made, but is now re-opened. We’ve all probably been to the cathedral, but does anyone know where the cornerstone for this great house of worship and Washington, D.C. landmark is located? On September 29, 1907 (the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels), the foundation stone was laid in a ceremony in which President Theodore Roosevelt and the Bishop of London spoke to a crowd of ten thousand. The stone itself came from a field near Bethlehem and was set into a larger piece of American granite on which was placed this inscription: **“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us”** (John 1:14), a portion of the Gospel appointed for Christmas Day. That foundation stone rests, now hidden, beneath the altar of the Bethlehem Chapel directly below the high altar at the east end of the cathedral. And with the laying of this cornerstone in 1907 began the longest-running construction project in Washington, D.C. history. It was not completed until 1990 when the final pinnacle stone was set in place on the southwest tower of the cathedral, 83 years to the day from when the cornerstone was laid. It is that concept of the Word-made-flesh as our cornerstone that I’d like to focus on. The message for this Christmas Day is entitled, “A Sure Foundation for Christmas.” May the Lord’s rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word, for Jesus’ sake.

The idea for this sermon came from a devotion given at the Ministry of Worship meeting in early November, in which St. John’s Minister of Worship (Lois Yasutis) shared information about the cornerstone of the National Cathedral. Pastors are always on the look-out for sermon material and creatively appropriate the ideas of others for preaching. Your own pastor is no exception to the rule, but I do want to give credit where credit is due here. Thank you, Lois! In today’s world, cornerstones have a symbolic and ceremonial value, but virtually no structural purpose at all. Here at St. John’s, we actually have two cornerstones. The original one, laid in 1959 when the first sanctuary (our present Fellowship Hall) was built, is at the base of the three crosses on the front lawn. The second one, laid in 1966 when the current sanctuary and narthex were built, is just outside the main entrance doors. And the third cornerstone, laid in 1988 when the Education Center was built, is at the far end of the Education Center where the front walkway begins. In the ancient world, cornerstones served a much more functional and practical purpose. The Biblical word for “cornerstone” means “the stone which is at the head of the corner.” In building city walls in the ancient world, cornerstones were vitally important and carefully selected for their size and strength because the rest of the wall or building rested upon them. The lower stones in the western wall of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem are an example of this. Built by Herod the Great, some of the foundation stones are over forty feet in length.

What is our cornerstone – not of the homes we live in, or even the churches in which we worship, but of our lives? What is the foundation stone upon which we build our lives? Is it our occupation, family, money? All of these things can be taken away in a moment, and what is left then? If we're going to build our lives on something, it had better be something that is trustworthy, permanent, and unchanging. Let the foundation of our lives have the same inscription as the foundation stone of the National Cathedral: **“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us”** (John 1:14). This is the timeless truth of life: that God sent his only begotten Son into the flesh to be born for us, to live, to suffer, die, and rise again in order that we might be redeemed from sin and death and hell. I can think of nothing that is more trustworthy, permanent, and unchanging than this. On the Christmas tree here in our sanctuary are a number of beautiful white and gold cross-stitch chrismons. These are uniquely Christian symbols used on Christmas trees, and one of them here illustrates this message (*get christmon from tree*). This chrismon pictures the Greek letters for Jesus Christ on a foundation stone. This is the sure foundation not only for Christmas, but for life. That Word-made-flesh, Jesus Christ, is the Light which shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Music really makes this season, doesn't it? All of the beloved Christmas carols speak deeply to the heart. But in keeping with the theme of this message, there may be some other appropriate music besides Christmas carols: “The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord...” (*Lutheran Book of Worship* 369), “Built on a rock the Church doth stand...” (*Lutheran Book of Worship* 365), “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness; no merit of my own I claim, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand” (*Lutheran Book of Worship* 293). Through the cleansing water of regeneration in Holy Baptism, we are joined together to Christ. Through God's Word and the gifts of Christ's true Body and Blood at the altar we are strengthened in our faith in Christ our cornerstone. We affirm what Peter spoke to the ruling Council in Jerusalem after Pentecost, **“This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”** (Acts 4:11-12).

In the New Year, we will engage in a congregation-wide emphasis called **Being SJLC** (Serving Jesus – Living in Community). We will learn and grow in our serving and living as Jesus' disciples today, and I encourage everyone to be part of this. With Christ the Word-made-flesh as our cornerstone, we're now being built together as God's own temple: **“As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”** (1 Peter 2:4-5). With Christ as our cornerstone, everything changes. Our life becomes a solid structure, able to bear its own weight gracefully in our families, places of work, and communities. As living stones held together by Christ, we are joined and knit together with fellow believers for strength and support, even as we live out his grace and truth in our lives.

To Christ our Cornerstone be all glory and praise forever. A blessed Christmas to you. Amen.