

John 1:1-18

“The Word Became Flesh and Still Dwells with Us”
The Nativity of Our Lord – Christmas Day

December 25, 2020

First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
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Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

It is all a matter of perspective. On Christmas Eve,

- We recalled how God influenced a Roman census to lead Mary and Joseph to the city of David, called Bethlehem.
- We recalled how Joseph was of the house and lineage of David.
- We recalled how while they were in Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to a Son and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and placed Him in a manger, since there was no place for them in the inn.
- We also recalled how in the same region, there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. We recalled how an angel of the Lord appeared to them and told them, **“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger”** (Luke 2:11-12).
- We recalled how these shepherds went with haste and found Mary, Joseph, and the Baby lying in a manger.

This morning, we hear another perspective on the birth of Christ. But John’s Gospel leaves out the historical background of Matthew 1 and Luke 2. Instead, John focuses upon what we cannot see with human eyes.

You see, John’s Gospel is different. The Holy Spirit leads John not to concern himself about relaying the facts. That has already been done in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Rather, the Holy Spirit leads John about giving those facts meaning. He informs us what our eyes fail to notice at the manger. He focuses on the theological application of Christmas, when **“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”** (John 1:14). This is John’s truth about Christmas.

[The Tabernacle]

Back in the Old Testament times, Jesus was there. He was dwelling, or better yet, tabernacling, with His people.

It was in the tabernacle where God revealed His glory. Now, this tabernacle was a tent designed by God Himself so that He would have a place to dwell among His people. Now, this tabernacle was a place of awe. This tabernacle was seen from miles around as everyone could witness God's glory in the cloud that rested in the innermost part of the tabernacle, known as the Most Holy Place. This was an awe-inspiring sight knowing that the one true God was seen in that cloud.

Here, in the tabernacle, the Lord made His presence known to His people. There, He met them and interacted with them. The Lord tabernacled among them, to guard and guide them, to give them His Word, to forgive them their sins through His appointed sacrifices, and to lead them to the Promised Land. Ultimately, the Lord tabernacled with His people to save them.

Now, this tabernacle would serve the Israelites for nearly 500 years until it was replaced by the Temple. Now, the glory of God never left the Israelites. He remained. His glory would continue to dwell with His people. This new temple would have the same design as the previous tabernacle, but the temple would be a permanent structure, rather than a tent.

[In the Beginning...]

But, in fact, Jesus was there before the construction of the tabernacle. Jesus was there even before time. ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”*** (John 1:1).

Here, John is purposefully taking our thoughts back to Genesis 1:1: ***“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”*** John is taking us as far back as we can go. He is taking us to eternity – before creation.

So, why is John drawing our attention to the Book of Genesis? Why would John focus on this in his Christmas account?

John is doing this to emphasize the Child born from Mary is connected with Creation and Life. John is emphasizing that Jesus, the Word of God, was present at the beginning. Jesus, the Word of God, was with God. Jesus, the Word of God, was God then; and Jesus, the Word of God is God now. Through the Word of God, the entire world came into existence through Him. Jesus not only contains life. Jesus is in fact, Life itself.

The Word that would become incarnate, that is, *“in the flesh,”* the God who would become fully man, is there. The Word has always been, and the Word will always be.

The Word did not begin at the incarnation. The Word is not trapped in heaven. The Word is the Alpha and Omega. The Word is the beginning and the end. But something did change. For the first time, through the incarnation, the eternal Word of God took on our human flesh and became man.

[The Mystery]

This is a profound mystery. We pondered this divine mystery as we sang “Of the Father’s Love Begotten.” It is hard to wrap our minds around how God could become like you and me, and have a human body, yet be without sin. How is that possible? How God could take the form of a baby inside a virgin’s womb is a mystery. Even Mary asked the angel: *“How will this be, since I am a virgin?”* (Luke 1:34).

But God reveals to us that this divine mystery became flesh through the power of the Holy Spirit, and we confess this divine mystery each Divine Service in the Creed.

This is a divine mystery that the Apostle Paul confesses to Timothy: *“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory”* (1 Timothy 3:16).

For us human creatures, we like to look at reason. If we do not see things that happened in the Bible happening today, many of us just dismiss it. We may overlook that the one true God is eternal and all powerful. We may overlook that the one true God can and does do amazing things.

In fact, God's Word accomplishes His purposes. The Word gave life to creation. This is the same life-giving Word of God that became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ – true God in the flesh.

[Why Christ Came in the Flesh]

But why did God have to dwell among us in human flesh? Why did Jesus have to come as a baby? Why couldn't Jesus had come as an adult?

Jesus came in the midst of fallen humanity to save us. As sinful human beings, we often search out false gods – like temporal safety and fortune – to give us happiness. We often focus on our wants and desires instead of being content. We often do not love our neighbor as we ought by being merciful, kind, and forgiving. So, the only way God's wrath for our sins could be settled would be for God to come in our flesh and dwell with us, and so He did with ***“grace and truth.”***

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us to redeem mankind from their sins. This is why He came as a baby.

You see, all of humanity, every one of us, had fallen into sin, ever since our first parents Adam and Eve disobeyed God by being deceived by Satan to eat of the forbidden fruit. Since the Fall of mankind in the Garden, no human being has been able to save themselves from sin. We are all trapped in sin and the wages of sin is eternal death apart from God. Our only hope would be a savior. And only God has the power to save. But at the same time, God's justice demands that those who sin must die. Since man had sinned, man must die. Sins cannot be swept under the rug, so to speak. Sin must be dealt with.

This is why the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus came, as a humble child, to do what God demands of His Law. Jesus kept the commandments to love God and to love one's neighbor perfectly. He is the only human being who has ever kept every single letter of God's Law.

Jesus is the only righteous man. He is totally innocent. Even so, He suffered and died in our place. Being true God His suffering and death have infinite worth. Through His suffering and death, Jesus died as our substitute and paid the price for our sins. In exchange for His innocent suffering and death, by grace through faith in Him, we receive perfect righteousness.

Then through His bodily resurrection, we know that He has indeed conquered the powers of sin and death upon all who believe in Him. So, when we repent and confess our sin to God our Father, we know that through the suffering and death of Jesus, that sin is forgiven by grace through faith Him!

[Dwelling Among Us]

Despite Jesus returning to heaven at His ascension, He has not left us. In fact, He has continued to dwell with us as He tabernacles with His people!

Through the incarnation, Jesus, true God and true man, has put on the tent of human flesh. Everything that God promised about the tabernacle now stands fulfilled in Jesus. Today, there is no more need for a physical tabernacle or Temple. He is the place where God dwells among us. He is the place of awe. He is the place of forgiveness of sins, which brings life and salvation to all who believe in Him.

However, He appears like any other child. There is nothing glorious about His appearance. Yet, He is glorious. In this man, the eternal God dwells. This young Child lying in His mother's arms is the One who created the entire universe and even the motherly arms that hold Him. This is awe-inspiring. This glorious God humbled Himself to be born of Mary and yet remain the source of all things.

This glorious God has shown His glory. First, through the incarnation. But He came not just to live in our flesh. He came ultimately to die in our flesh, so that we would be saved from our sins through His death, and from His death, we receive life! The Word that became flesh came for this reason: ***“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him”*** (John 3:16-17).

You see, the Word of God became flesh in order to save you and me! He came as a humble baby boy knowing full well then what He came to do. In order to save us from our sins, He would have to die. The only cure for sin would be His death.

Even though He has died, rose, and has ascended to heaven, the Word of God that became flesh for us is still dwelling with us. His presence, His glory, and His grace is no less available for us today than it was when He was lying in Mary's arms. His glory was manifest to you in your Baptism, a glory that remains with you. His glory is ever present with us in Scripture and in hearing the Word of Christ, a glory that remains with you. His glory is truly present under bread and wine.

In the Lord's Supper, He comes to you with the very same body and blood that Mary held in her arms, the very same body and blood that was crucified for your salvation, the very same body and blood that rose from the dead, the very same body and blood that will come again for you on the Last Day, the very same body and blood in which you behold His glory, the glory of the one and only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Even in times of social distancing, Christ has never become distant with us! The very Word of God made flesh still dwells with us in Word and Sacrament!

So, on this Christmas morning, we confess the incarnation! The Word has become flesh and He still dwells with us! From Him we receive unending blessings: forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation!

By faith in Christ, God in human flesh, He brings all of God's blessings to you! His chief blessing is His grace! Merry Christmas! Amen!

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠