

Saint Luke shows us the Christ in Mary's baby. St. John does not show, he explains. Luke is the storyteller, and John is the college professor. Luke shows us the utter accessibility of God in the flesh, the tender mercy of the Christ as a helpless infant. Where as John teaches us how the divine nature has joined us to Himself. The traditional balance of reading Luke chapter 2 on Christmas Eve and John chapter 1 on Christmas Day is simply brilliant. Not only does it make sense theologically, first giving the details of the history and then moving to give the theological sense and meaning, it also makes a great deal of sense culturally.

Luke 2 is the easier reading, more fit for children, more fit for evangelism, more fit, frankly, for visitors who come but once or twice a year. John is more difficult, more profound. But also, I think, more rewarding. Luke sets his account concretely in the history of the world, in the days of Caesar Augustus, Cyrenius is governor of Syria. God is Lord over history, working through it that in the fullness of time His Son enters into creation at the right time and the right place, and so focused attention on Joseph and Mary of the line of David but living in Nazareth, are brought unto little Bethlehem in the land of Judah where the Christ is born.

John, by contrast, is absolutely cosmic in scale. The Word is eternal, He is in the beginning before creation. He is with God and He is God. He Himself created the entirety of the universe. In Luke, Jesus is born at night, it is dark. In John, Jesus is the Light shining in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome Him. In Luke there is no room in the inn. John explains, "**He came unto His own, and His own did not receive Him.**" In Luke, Jesus is announced by the angels to shepherds as the newborn Savior, Christ the Lord. In John, Jesus appears on the scene full grown, ready to be anointed in the Jordan River, propelled into the desert, tempted by the Devil, to be exalted on the Holy Cross for the sins of the world. It is John the Baptist who announces Him. He tells us that Jesus is eternal, ranks before him because He was before him. And then the evangelist tells us that Jesus is the Christ the only-begotten Son of the Father who reveals His Father to us and makes us His sons.

When the two accounts are placed side-by-side as they must be, because John's Gospel is best understood in relation to at least one of the other three. We have to get the details of the story, the basic history, first before we can fruitfully delve into John. When John is placed alongside of Luke, I find the most striking thing to be that Luke calls St. Mary a virgin, telling us of the Holy Spirit's overshadowing of her and the fulfillment of the prophecy, whereas in John, the Word becomes flesh and it is the children of God, the believers, who are begotten of God without the blood or the will of man.

We have the profound application that John then makes from Christ to us. It's a sort of strange turning of the false promise Satan made to Eve in the Garden. The Devil told Eve that if she would eat of the fruit of the tree she would be like God, knowing good and evil. That is a deception, because Eve took that to mean, powerful like God, all-knowing, the master of her own fate. In fact what Satan meant and wanted is that Adam and Eve would become like him, seeking their own way, their own glory, their own greatness, rather than depend on God, what He gives, what He provides.

Adam and Eve fell into sin, but God did not permit them to become little Satans, children of the devil. Adam and Eve were the crown of creation, to them had been given dominion over all the earth, and so He Himself enters into the Garden, walking in the cool of the day, coming gently, calmly, quietly, seeking

them out. He would speak with them. He does not come with the armies of angels, with the force of His might, fire and brimstone. He comes seeking and He delivers a promise. Satan cannot win. He is not allowed to steal Adam and Eve away. They will not be on his side. God is on their side. He will join Adam and Eve, will take up their fallen, weak flesh through Eve's seed, and He will stand between them and Satan. He brings enmity, opposition between humanity and the devil.

He pledges to become one of us to make this terrible wrong right, to make the payment and satisfaction in Himself. And so He is born of the Virgin without the will or aid of a man. And John takes that truth of our Lord's incarnation and birth, that tremendous act of God's grace for our salvation, and applies it to us. All who believe in Him become like Him. They become the children of God, born from above, not by the will of man. They also are made by grace what He is by nature. Pure, claimed by God with His own name upon them in Holy Baptism.

You now belong to God. He is your Father. You are born of the holy Church. You belong to Him forever and Satan cannot have you. The virgin born are the believers, defined by Jesus Christ and His birth of Mary in Bethlehem. In addition to all the history given us by Luke and by Matthew, that we would know what happened, John wants us to know this: why God became a man, why it is that this Man Jesus is God for us, that this reality defines everything in our lives and in eternity. This is the grace and truth, the fullness of Christ which we have all received. We are shown the eternal and creative mercy of God that would not let Satan win, that chose to be on our side, to be one of us, to win us back again not as subjects whom He owns by right of creation, to do with whatever He wanted, but to restore us as His beloved children.