

There are two central figures of Christmas: two births in which we rejoice. The first is obvious: the Lord Jesus. We hear “Christmas” and we think of Luke’s account of the Lord’s birth. If the Christmas hymns are not directed to the newborn King, which many of them are, they are about Him. The second birth of Christmas is not as obvious: ours. Unless your name is Mary or Joseph, you will not find your name mentioned in the Gospel of Luke. And yet the pageants of our childhood taught us rightly. We are to see ourselves in this wondrous event. We are to imitate the blessed Virgin, cradling the Lord in the arms of our heart, we are to believe in Him, as Luther so beautifully puts it in the hymn sung last night:

*Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child,
Prepare a bed, soft, undefiled,
A quiet chamber set apart
For You to dwell within my heart.*

We imitate the angels in that we thank and praise God for His peace and goodwill toward us in the birth of this Child. Indeed, we sing the very song they brought down from heaven on that first Christmas. We imitate the shepherds, who witness it, who adore the infant Lord, and who tell all whom we encounter of what we have heard and seen.

Who are these two central figures exactly? Who is this infant Child that captures the attention of earth and heaven? Where is He from? John tells us. This newborn babe is the eternal Son, the Word of the Father. He was there in the beginning, He Himself has no beginning. In fact “**all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.**” This little Child is the one whom sea and wind obey. The cows and donkey that stare this newborn in the face behold their very Creator, the One whose power even then gives them air to breathe and hay to eat. On this great and holy day we confess that even as God’s own Son is born a child, neither His birth on this earth, nor His conception is His beginning as a Person for He is *God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.* The virgin gives birth in time to a timeless Son. She gives human flesh to the eternally begotten Son of the Father;

That is who He is. Who are we? Isaiah tells us: we are “**The people who walked in darkness.**” “**Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness.**” We are those who did not know Him. Though we are but creatures, as Isaiah later says, “**All we like sheep have gone astray; and we have turned—every one—to his own way.**” The world’s Creator comes in our very flesh as was needed and as was promised, John says “**He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.**”

He is life, there is no life apart from Him. Yet spurn and reject Him we did. It is not just the people of Israel from which He received His human nature who would not receive Him. Already in the Garden, the ancient bonds of Adam’s sin enslaved us. We sat as captives from the moment of our conception, indeed, willingly complicit, actively turned against our Maker.

We would rather not be the children of God, but of the devil. And so where God would give life, we preferred death, going our own way, seeking our own desires. We examine our lives honestly in light of God’s Word, His holy demands, and we easily see whose son we are. We are born into this world as God’s creation, yes, but in captivity under, with our allegiance cast with the devil. And what we inherit by who and what we are, what we inherit by virtue of our birth according to the flesh, is not life but death.

But what this holy day teaches us, what the first chapter of John’s Gospel proclaims to us, is that the Son of God was born as a son of man, so that man might be born as a son of God. The eternal “**Word became flesh and dwelt among us.**” We didn’t want Him, didn’t love Him, yet the Father in love sent Him anyways, and the Son, in love, came anyways. He came to dwell among us. He is bound in swaddling clothes to loose the bonds of your sin. He came to suffer our rejection, to be rejected to the point of death bearing our sins, and thereby seated on His glorious throne: the cross. The child who lay in the wood of the manger goes on to hang from the wood of the cross.

And there is where we see His glory. It's not the stuff of heaven, halos, and harps. The glory of the only Son of the Father is Him given into death to bear our sin and be our Savior. There you see His glory. There you see grace and truth. There is the light and grace which efface, wipe, take away, our guilt. There you see the light shining the darkness, the deepest darkness of sin and death and hell, and yet the darkness did not, could not, overcome it.

That is who He is. That is what He has done for us because of who we are. And so who we are is changed. St. Paul tells us: "**He saved us...according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit...**" In Jesus you are justified: declared righteous because of His perfect sacrifice. In Jesus you have been made a child of God, an heir, having the hope of eternal life. His light and life is given to you.

It is for us men and for our salvation that He came down from heaven...was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man; was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate...suffered and was buried...rose again...ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father.

Who the Lord Jesus is by nature, the Son of the Father, you have been made by grace. By what this same Lord Jesus has done you are made a child of the Father. All that Jesus has accomplished through His life in our flesh, His nine months in the womb, His birth, His holy and perfect life, His death and resurrection, that is all given to you. He joins Himself and gives all that He has done to you in the waters of Holy Baptism. It is all reckoned to you as your own in those blessed waters. That is where you were born of God. That is what faith believes.

This is what it means to receive Him, to believe in His name. It is to lay hold of this Lord, not in His fiery divine glory that would consume you, but in His humble flesh, flesh like yours, come into this world to save you.

So today is not just the birthday of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, but yours as well. Even as you celebrate the birth of the Son of God in human flesh, you celebrate that in Him you are set free from the ancient bondage of sin, reborn, and alive to God in Christ Jesus.