

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD:

Jesus, the Firstfruit of Jesse's Tree

John 1:1–14

OPENING

Pray: O God, You make us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Grant that as we joyfully receive Him as our Redeemer, we may with sure confidence behold Him when He comes to be our Judge; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Christmas Eve; *LSB Altar Book*, p. 845)

INTRODUCTION

Of the Father's love begotten
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending He,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see
Evermore and evermore. (*LSB* 384:1)

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels because they describe the events of Jesus' life in a parallel way, from a similar point of view. Although they clearly teach that Jesus is God even before His resurrection, they begin by focusing on His human nature. Not so with St. John! He lets us know about the divine nature of Jesus when he says, "the Word was God" (John 1:1) and then emphasizes the incarnation, "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (1:14).

QUESTIONS

1. Compare Genesis 1:1–3 with John 1:1–4. How does John's passage illuminate who was active in the creation? What similarities and differences exist between these verses?
2. In John 1:1–5, how does John emphasize that the incarnation of God's Son would not be for His own sake but for ours? How does he signal that no opposition from darkness could defeat the Word's mission? Compare with John 12:31–36.
3. How does John 1:5–9 show that, even though John the Baptist only comes on the scene some thirty years after Christmas, he is integral to the life of Jesus? How do the last words of John the Baptist recorded in John's Gospel (3:26–30) demonstrate what he came to do?

4. Although Baptism is not specifically mentioned in John 1:12–13, in what way is this language baptismal? How does Jesus flesh out the baptismal connections in John 3:1–6? How does that passage demolish so-called decision theology?
5. According to John 6:51–58, why did “the Word” take up human flesh? What are the benefits of this for believers?
6. What does the dwelling of the Word among us in the incarnation promise for believers in the future? See Revelation 7:13–17; 21:1–4.

CONCLUSION

Oh, that birth forever blessèd,
When the virgin, full of grace,
By the Holy Ghost conceiving,
Bore the Savior of our race,
And the babe, the world’s Redeemer,
First revealed His sacred face
Evermore and evermore. (*LSB* 384:2)

Christ is the firstfruit of the Jesse Tree, which is the Jesus Tree, and He is a unique kind of firstfruit: “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:19–23). Baptized into Christ, we have the promise of resurrection and everlasting life, all thanks to Jesus, “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” in death.

CLOSING

Pray: Almighty God, grant that the birth of Your only-begotten Son in the flesh may set us free from the bondage of sin; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Christmas Day; *LSB Altar Book* p. 562)