

CHRISTMAS DAY, DECEMBER 25, 2020

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Lectionary Readings: Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 2; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-14

Sermon Title: *Christmas, as John Writes It*

Prayer: *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of [our] heart[s] be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, [our] Rock and [our] Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)*

Salutation: Grace and peace to you this holy day from Christ our Lord, the Light of the World (cf. John 8:12).

Text: The Word from God through which the Holy Spirit comes to stir our hearts for Christmas Day is from our Gospel Reading: The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the first chapter.

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ, last night, Christian churches throughout the world proclaimed the birth of Christ from the words of St. Luke. Those words about the nativity of Jesus are most familiar. There is much humanity in Luke's writing:

- Proper names of real people: Joseph. Mary. Quirinius.
- Real places on the map: Syria. Nazareth. Bethlehem.
- Passionate emotions expressed by those real people: Joy. Fear. Relief.

This morning we hear or better yet, feast upon the words of St. John. These words of John focus upon the divinity of Jesus. There's nothing here about the trip to Bethlehem, the swaddling cloths, or the quaking shepherds.

Still, John reports as accurately as Luke did, even as John is focusing on the glory of the person of the Word made flesh. In our text today: ST. JOHN PREPARES A DIVINE FEAST OF THE WORD.

I. In his account of the Gospel, John confesses that it is *God* in the flesh Who makes that night stand out in history. We already know God didn't need reporters or a book contract to make that night holy. He could have brought that night forth even without the shepherds, angels, and manger.

For God made that night holy because of Himself. God came to earth, taking on human flesh. Incarnate, we say. And though many historians, scientists, politicians, and even theologians miss the significance, God's holy people don't. Life was manifested in Jesus. He is the Light of men.

That's why God, the Father, makes the announcement of the birth of His eternal Son in a big way through His messenger angel. And He wants the world to know!

However, on this joyous Christmas morn, we need to be warned that the world is already past the point of believing what John has written. Rather, the world warms up to a human-interest story as reported by Luke. There, loving all the details of the names, the places, the emotions. Whether coming from the lips of a pastor in a stole at a lectern or coming from the lips of Linus holding his blanket in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, running now every year for almost six decades.

Yes, the world can become sentimental to Luke's account of the Gospel. But the Gospel according to St. John is hardly considered on an equal level. We hear the words of John: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh*" (vv 1, 14).

That is John's truth about Christmas. But that's not truth taught according to the secular universities or published by popular public press, such as *The New Yorker*. For those sources, "*in the beginning*" there were molecules or gasses or nothing at all or "*we're not sure.*" But John is sure!

He says that it's better to be a child of God than to be a citizen of the world. So, John starts with the Word, the preincarnate Christ:

- He was in the beginning.
- He was with God.
- He was God.
- He made all things.

But does one have to believe John in order to believe that Jesus was a cuddly baby born in a manger? Isn't it possible to believe that Jesus was born in Bethlehem without believing that Jesus also created all the heavens and all the earth (Psalm 33:6)? Why not? Why are the baby Jesus and His existence as the Son of God *before Bethlehem* inseparable from one another?

Why? The Church has always needed to answer that question. Even before the Bible was written, believers had to answer the question of whether the God Who created the world was also the God Who would redeem the world. Yet:

- Those pre-Bible believers couldn't say: "*The Bible tells me so.*"
- There was no Bible in Adam and Eve's day.

So, what's going on here? Consider the world, writes John, is in darkness. John insists that the world was made by God, made by the One who is Light. But the world did not know Him. Not then. Not now. Why? Because darkness envelops the world. That darkness is sin. For the world does not know the true God because the world does not know its sin, its wickedness, its evil.

II. But John also confesses that some are not in the darkness:

- They believe.
- They believe that Jesus is God.
- They believe not because they are morally better or because they are above average IQ or because they had an inner light already burning in them.

Rather, as John says it best: “[*These*] were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (v 13).

Truly, they have been born from above, from on high. The Lord has done the work. Being born of God is Holy Baptism’s work. Thus:

- Holy Baptism is God’s work.
- Baptism is “*of God.*”
- Baptism is a bathing in Jesus.

Paul wrote to Titus: “[*God*] saved us . . . by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:5–6).

Therefore, these words of Paul are refreshing, like cool water upon the face in the morning. So that what St. John wrote in his Gospel about the nativity of Jesus was “*written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name*” (John 20:31).

Those who are still in darkness hate this talk of John. They refuse to confess sin and death and thus cannot confess Jesus as Savior over sin and death. The world answers that Jesus doesn’t need to be God, your God. Your god can be anyone or anything. Therefore:

- A god can be: You. Your friend. Your dog. Your inner thoughts. The entire universe.
- A god can be anything from which you get help, comfort, pleasure, good vibes, or reassurances.

However, those in the Light, the baptized, love this talk of having life in His name. Their sin is covered by the glorious Savior, Jesus. That’s why the Babe of Bethlehem needs to be God the Lord – the God Who made all things.

And so, as true God and man:

- Were Jesus not man, He could never have died in our place.
- But unless He is also God, He could never have conquered death for us.

Thus, the two natures – human and divine – in one. You can’t have one without the other. That of Lord and God.

For God's Son, Jesus:

- Has brought redemption to the world in His flesh by the forgiveness of sin.
- And He was also the Word creating at the creation of the world.

However:

- Don't expect the miracle of faith wrought by the Holy Spirit's work outside of the Gospels.
- Don't expect the themes of the Word as Creator and the Word as Redeemer to be explained or photographed magnificently in a *National Geographic* article this month or to be broached in the inaugural address by the US president next month.

However, you can:

- Expect those themes to be covered here at this pulpit, weekly, in this holy assembly.
- Expect them to be heralded here in this small tabernacle in liturgy and hymn, whereby the darkness of your sin is covered by the light of Jesus' work.
- Expect them to be delivered to you in this building in the ordinary and in the supernatural.
 - Yes, in an ordinary six-day period, our Lord did the supernatural: He created the heavens and the earth.
 - Yes, the Lord of all became an ordinary male, born in a stall, via the supernatural birth to a virgin.
 - Yes, the Lord's supernatural body and blood are in ordinary bread and wine.
 - Yes, simple water plus the extraordinary Word of God poured upon the head of an infant forgives that child's sin.

For you see:

- The Word of God made the world, *and* the Word of God became flesh.
- The Word of God dripped His blood from the cross *and* the Word of God rose from the dead.
- The Word of God has overcome your darkness *and* the Word of God brings you into His Light

Conclusion: Dear friends in Christ, that's the Feast of Christmas. Merry Christmas.

In the name of ✠ Jesus, Who forgives all your sins. Amen.

To God alone the Glory!