

December 25, 2020
"The Glory of Christmas"
John 1:1-14

People love Christmas. They like to give and receive gifts. They love lights, especially during this darkest time of the year. And people love little babies. They love cute little babies that don't fuss. Those of you who attended the children's Christmas service last week may have noticed that the second verse of "Away in a Manger" was left out. It begins with the words, "The cattle are lowing, the poor Baby wakes, but little Lord Jesus no crying he makes." This is an example of where sentiment replaces sound doctrine. Jesus was a sinless child. That does not mean he never cried. It's no sin for a baby to cry. Babies cry. They don't know how to talk yet. So they cry. That's how they communicate. Jesus was a baby. Jesus was a real baby. He cried.

When God became flesh he became a real, not a pretend, baby. Christmas is the celebration of the incarnation of God. God became flesh. St. John writes, "In the beginning was the Word." Moses wrote in Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God." In the beginning is before time began. Before time began the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. He appeared to Abraham as the Angel of the LORD. In the Proverbs, Solomon called him Wisdom. St. John calls him the Word. He was with God. He was God. He reveals God to us. He shows us God. He shows us God because he is God's only begotten Son.

We Christians are children of God because we were born again. John writes in our text,

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

We became children of God. There was a time when we were not children of God. When we were born, we were not children of God but children of wrath as the Bible says. We were born spiritually blind. We were not children of God. We became children of God when we were born of God, that is, when we were born from above of water and the Holy Spirit. We are not born again by human power or will, but by the power and will of God. We, who were not his children, became his children.

The Word did not become the Word. "In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God." There was not a time when he was not. He is eternal. St. John writes, "All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." We confess, "By whom all things were made." The Word is the Creator. The Creator of all things that were made was not created. If he were created, he could be not the Creator of all created things. The Word did not become the Son of the Father. As we confess about him: "begotten of his Father before all worlds," "true God, begotten of the Father from eternity." From eternity the Word was with God the Father. The Word was equal to the Father. The Word was God.

The heretics use their human reason to refute what God says because their human reason tells them that it cannot be. How can a little baby lying in a manger be the Creator of the universe? The fourth century heretic, Arius, said that the Word could not really be God. We should say instead that he was like God. He was of a similar substance as the Father, but not of the same substance. The Church, on the basis of God's written word, refuted Arius's heresy and confessed that the Word who became flesh is of the same substance as the Father and that by him all things were made. The old Arian heresy has continued to plague the Church throughout history, leading souls away from their Savior. Jehovah's Witnesses are Arians. They call themselves Christian but they are not. Like Arius,

they elevate their own reason above the word of God. In so doing they reject him who is the life of all the living. St. John writes:

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

The New Testament word for Word is logos. The Greek word “logos” is where we get the English word logical. It’s where we get all words ending in “ology” that deal with the reasonable study of a particular topic. When we hear of the Word being with God and the Word being God we conclude that God is reasonable, logical, and intelligent. He made us in his image to think, to reason, to apply this to that, to learn so that we could understand and teach others. We don’t live our lives as animals, seeking by instinct this or that desire, without reflecting on what we are doing. God made us to think and to use our God-given reason.

When God made Adam and Eve their minds were pure and untainted by sin. They were naturally smart. They understood all they needed to know. They communed with God intellectually, with a pure understanding. When they chose to listen to the diabolical promise that when they knew good and evil they would be like God, they lost their innocence. They lost their spiritual discernment. Their intellect was corrupted.

Before the fall, their reason directed them toward the living God. They walked in the light of his truth. His word was their delight. The eternal Word by whom all things were made was their life and their light. But, as God warned Adam, the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. They died and all their descendants died with them – all but he who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

Since the fall, what seems so spiritual, so reasonable, so God-like to the religiously minded has been the very opposite. In the Word is true life. He is the light that enlightens everyone who is enlightened. We are all born spiritually blind. If we are not enlightened by the Word we are living in darkness. What appears to be especially spiritual is especially devilish. Who is God? What is he like? How does he come to us? When fallen sinful human reason considers these questions the result is idolatry.

The Word is the only Light. The preacher who preaches the word is not the light. John wasn't the Light. He only bore witness to the Light. Our pastors today are not the Light. They have nothing of their own to say or give. They proclaim him who is the true Light that gives light to every man who comes into this world. There is no spirituality, no knowledge of God, no divine light, nothing but sin, darkness, blindness, and death apart from the Word.

This is why the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Literally, he tented among us. St. John here reminds us of the tent of meeting, in old English we called it the tabernacle, where God met the children of Israel during their wandering in the Sinai wilderness. Much blood was shed in the tabernacle. To enjoy fellowship with God required the shedding of blood for the forgiveness of sins. The bloody sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed to the blood of Jesus shed on the cross for us. Before the Word became flesh, he was present with the Old Testament church in the sprinkling of the blood. The Word was not yet visible. But he was with them. The Old Testament church trusted in the Word who would become flesh.

We see him lying in a manger. Look at him where he wants you to see him. Who is it that lies in a manger crying for his mother's milk? He is the Creator God. He is the eternal Word by whom all things were made. He who depends on his mother's care is his mother's God. Mary is the mother of God for the Word became flesh. The eternal God took up residence in the Virgin's womb. The Child she

bore was God in the flesh. He whom the worlds cannot enclose doth in Mary's lap repose.

In him is life. He and he alone is the Light of the world. John beheld his glory. He was there when Jesus changed water into wine, doing what only God could do. He created. John witnessed Christ's miracles. He was on the Mt. of Transfiguration where Jesus's face shone like the sun. When the Word became flesh he revealed his glory. His glory is the glory he received from the Father from eternity. It is a glory that is full of grace and truth.

Any child of God would want to see God in his glory. Remember how Moses asked God to see his glory when he was on Mt. Sinai? But God said no. No one can see his glory and live. So Moses hid under the cleft of a rock. He saw God's back, not his face. The glory of God is pure, powerful, and sinless. It exposes our sins. No sinner can witness the uncovered glory of God and live to talk about it.

This is why the Word became flesh. He became flesh to reveal God's glory in a way that we could see it, embrace it, rejoice in it, celebrate it, and share in it. That's because when the Word became flesh – when God became our brother – he was full of grace and truth. You see baby Jesus and you see God for he is God. You see God's glory, but you need not hide your face from it. You can embrace his glory because it is full of grace and truth.

O Jesus Christ, Thy manger is
My paradise at which my soul reclineth.
For there, O Lord, doth lie the Word made flesh for us;
Herein thy grace forth shineth.

He becomes your brother to do for you what you could not do for yourself. You did not love purely. You loved yourself first and most. You did not love God above all things. You did not love your neighbor as yourself. Your love was polluted by your sin. His love

knew no sin. He loved purely. His love is that perfect obedience to God that you owed to God. You owed it but could not pay it. He paid it for you. His love bore your sin. He fulfilled the promise of the Old Testament tabernacle. He shed his blood to take away the sin of the world. This innocent Child grew to be an innocent man in order to bring us guilty sinners back into fellowship with God. Look to Jesus and see how God sees you!

Oh, then rejoice that through His Son
 God is at sinners now at one;
 Made like yourselves of flesh and blood,
 Your brother is the eternal God.

Christmas is God joining us sinners to reconcile us to himself. God assumed our flesh and blood. Jacob did not climb up the ladder. God climbed down. A man did not become God. God became a man. He became a little baby. He became a real baby; not a pretend baby. But he did not stop being God. Rather, God the Son – not the Father and not the Holy Spirit, but the Son, that is, the Word – became flesh. From eternity he was begotten of the Father. Two thousand years ago he was born of the Virgin Mary. Today he is born in us.

He did not shun the manger. Oh, I'm sure that when the cattle were lowing and the poor Baby woke up he cried a bit. That God should become a baby and cry is a bit unsettling, perhaps. But what a wonder it is to see! That the almighty Creator God did not shun a manger where cattle had recently fed teaches you something about him that you need to know.

This teaches you that he won't shun you. He came for you. He loves you. He loves you no matter who you are. St. John tells us of the terrible tragedy that he came to his own and his own did not receive him. For that, Jesus cried. He looked upon Jerusalem and cried over her, lamenting her imminent destruction because they rejected their

Savior when he came. And why did he cry? He loved them. He did not stop loving them.

He does not stop loving you. He embraced poverty, humility, weakness, and, when his obedience sent him to the cross, the sin of the whole world. He took your sin upon himself. Look at him and see God's grace. See God's love for you. That you don't deserve it doesn't mean it isn't so. It is so! Your God became your brother because he loves you. He obeyed his own law in your stead because he loves you. He faced the judgment of his own law on the cross because he loves you. He died for you because he loves you. He took away all your sins on the cross and gives you this forgiveness because he loves you. Today he is risen from the dead. He sends his Holy Spirit to you to bring you to faith, sustain you in the faith, and bring you to glory because he loves you.

Sometimes Christmas makes us a little blue. Sentimental times bring up sentimental feelings and they're sometimes touched with sadness. The joy of Christmas is more than sentiment. It is the knowledge that in Christ, through faith in him, we have the rights of children. God is our Father. For Christ's sake he buries our sins in the depths of the sea. He looks on us with favor. He gives us his Son and with him his peace and goodwill. He fills us with his Spirit, the Spirit of truth, who confirms our hearts in the saving truth. We need not stumble through life in spiritual ignorance, wondering what the future holds. We know the Christ Child as our Creator, our Brother, and our Savior from sin.

Thou Christian heart, whoever thou art
Be of good cheer and let no sorrow move thee
For God's own Child in mercy mild joins thee to him
How greatly God must love thee! Amen