

In Nomine Iesu

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EXORDIUM

Christmas changed the world. How could it be otherwise? The Creator took on created flesh. God became man to save man. Whether or not sinners believe this Gospel, they are certainly aware of it. Our culture tries to substitute Santa Claus and holiday trees and gift giving instead of Jesus, but everyone knows that the reason Christmas is celebrated at all is because of Christ. And this is how we view the celebration that goes on at this time. The lights that people string outside and inside their homes remind us of the true Light shining in this dark world. The gifts under our tree remind us of the Gift wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger. The efforts to make sure everyone has something for Christmas remind us that the Christ came for all people without distinction.

But there are many who celebrate Christmas without Christ. Some do this out of ignorance and some on purpose. They attempt to ease their restless souls with earthly things, but those things never satisfy. Their beautiful new clothes are soon soiled, torn, and discarded. Their new toys are cast aside and forgotten. Their piles of delicious food fail to satisfy, and the hunger grows. The soul needs what the world cannot provide. The soul needs Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter. Without Christ, we gather with the world around a manger that is nothing but old straw. Without Christ, we stare at a cross that promises nothing but death, and at a grave which never gives up its occupants.

But by God's grace, our Christmas today is not empty. Our souls do not go hungry. Our hopes and fears do not go unanswered. Because Jesus Christ has come. He came to save you and me and all who sit in darkness. He came to rescue us from this evil world and to take us to His heavenly kingdom of light. In thankfulness for these wonderful gifts, let us rise to sing hymn #142, "Rejoice, Rejoice This Happy Morn!"

Rejoice, rejoice this happy morn!
A Savior unto us is born,
The Christ, the Lord of glory.
His lowly birth in Bethlehem
The angels from on high proclaim
And sing redemption's story.
My soul,
Extol
God's great favor;
Bless Him ever
For salvation.
Give Him praise and adoration!

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O Lord God, our heavenly Father, who of Your great goodness and mercy caused Your only begotten Son to become incarnate, that we through Him might be redeemed from sin and everlasting death; we pray, enlighten our hearts that we may be truly thankful for His gracious incarnation and birth, that we may be comforted by the same in all time of tribulation and temptation, and in the end receive Your everlasting salvation; through Your dear Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 57)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for this morning is taken from the first chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, beginning with the first verse. We read as follows in Jesus' name:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. / There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. / The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. / And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who was made flesh for your salvation, dear fellow redeemed:

The Gospel according to St. Luke tells us very clearly that Jesus is true Man, born of the Virgin Mary. The Gospel according to St. John does not retrace these steps. St. John rather focuses on the fact that Jesus is true God. His Gospel starts with, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" This should make us think of the first verse of the book of Genesis, "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*" When God the Father created all things, He created them through His Son. Which is exactly what John explains, "*All things were made through him [that is, the Word], and without him was not any thing made that was made.*"

Whenever God spoke, the Son was active. This Word brought about light, soil, and water, the sun, moon, and stars, animals on land and in the air and sea, and finally man. "*In him was life,*" said John. He shared this life with all created things. In the beginning, there was no sickness or death - only pure, unceasing life. And so it would have remained if Satan had not rebelled against God, and if Adam and Eve had not eaten from the forbidden tree. But what God warned Adam about sadly came true, "*in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die*" (Gen. 2:17).

Adam and Eve desperately wanted to get their perfect life back. But there was no way for them to do this. Eating from the Tree of Life would not help; this would only trap them forever in their sinful bodies. Seeing no solution for their sin, they hid from God. But the Word was still with God, and in that Word was life. The LORD promised to send the Word in flesh to crush Satan's head and save mankind. This is what we celebrate at Christmas, that **The Son of God Joins Us in Our Weakness.**

I

The great hymnwriter Paul Gerhardt wrote these words from our chief hymn, "He whom the sea / And wind obey / Doth come to serve the sinner in great meekness. / Thou, God's own Son, / With us art one, / Dost join us and our children in our weakness" (ELH 161, v. 2). It is truly remarkable that the God who creates whatever He wants with nothing but the Word, would enter His creation as a Servant. God sent His Son to become one with us, to take on our flesh, to join us in our weakness.

But describing ourselves as "weak" is really an understatement. The fact is we are dead in our sins by nature, as dead as Adam and Eve were when they ate what God commanded them not to eat. On our own we are hopeless, lost in the darkness of the devil's kingdom on earth. We do not like to think of ourselves in this way. We like to think that we are not all bad, that we have always had a little flame of good glowing in our hearts. But to rely on our own natural goodness in any way is to do away with Jesus. And if we do not have Jesus, then we cannot have life. There is no life apart from Him. We can have something we call "life" in this world, but that is not truly living. It is only a temporary life, which must come to an end.

The only way for our dying flesh to regain the life we were meant to have from the beginning, is for the Word of God to enter into our flesh. And that is what the Apostle John describes in the first chapter of his Gospel, "*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" But John would have been among the first to admit that he did not understand Jesus' purpose until later. No one did. "*He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.*" This is because the Christ did not come with magnificent displays of power. He did not arrive in majesty attended by all the saints and angels. He came in great meekness. His purpose was to save sinners through suffering.

Why would God do this? Why would he enter the dark world, taking on the weak flesh of mankind? Why would He put up with all the abuse, scorn, and pain culminating in a horrible death? The reason is summed up in one word: love. God loved the world that had broken His Commandments and rebelled against Him. The Creator had compassion on His fallen creation. He wanted them again to have and enjoy the life that was always meant to be theirs. In love God the Father sent His Son into the world, and in love, Jesus went to the cross to offer His death for your life. What an amazing thing that the Life-Giver should willingly choose to die for you! He wanted you to "*have life and have it abundantly*" (Jn. 10:10).

II

And you do have it by faith in Him. You have in Christ what Adam and Eve had in the Garden of Eden before the fall. You have pure, unceasing life and "*peace with God*" (Rom. 5:1). You have these gifts from God because "*the Word made flesh,*" who gives life and light, has joined Himself

to your flesh. If you are joined to the devil in unrepentant sin, you will receive the wages of that sin, which is death. But if you are united with Jesus by faith, you must receive the wages of His perfect life and atoning death, which is eternal life.

Jesus filled you with His life at your Baptism, when you were raised by the waters to newness of life (Rom. 6:4). He fills you again whenever you hear His Gospel of forgiveness, and whenever you consume His life-giving body and blood in His Supper. These are the ways that God's Son still joins Himself to you in your weakness. These are the ways that He expels the darkness of sin in your hearts and minds.

The Lord does not want you to wonder where you stand with Him. He does not want you to be weighed down with the guilt of past sins. He does not want you to fear death. Jesus was born for you, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, you have been born again in Him. You are not among those who appear to have life but are actually dead. You are alive in Christ. He joined Himself to you and made you a member of His body. This union did not change Him, but it has changed you. You were lost in the darkness of unbelief but now see the light of God's grace. You were without hope but now rest in the sure promises of God. You were terrified of death but now look past it to eternal life beyond.

God's Son became one with you and all humans when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. Now that He is our Brother in the flesh, we know that God will never forsake us. He is faithful to His children and wants us to inherit all the riches of eternal life. This is why **The Son of God Joins Us in Our Weakness**. It is so that we may join Him in His glory.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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