

The Festival of the Holy Nativity of Our Lord
St. John 1:1-14: "The Eternal Word Dwells in You."
December 25, 2017 | Jerico Evangelical Lutheran Church

In Nomine Iesu

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EXORDIUM

Jesus is born! Is this a matter of faith or fact? The evangelists state it as a fact. Luke gives the most details. He mentions historical territories and cities, and he provides the names of both the Roman emperor and the governor of Syria. Throughout the Gospel accounts, we are given the names of more historical places and people. We learn about Herod the Great and his son, also named Herod. The well-known Jewish teacher Gamaliel is mentioned. The Roman governor Pontius Pilate weighs in on the question of Jesus' guilt or innocence. Even non-biblical sources near the time of Jesus make reference to His work and to His supernatural powers. The birth and existence of Jesus is a fact.

That He actually lived is one thing. That He lived for you is another. Your name is not recorded in the pages of the Bible as an intended recipient of God's grace, and neither is mine. Martin Luther said he was glad his name is not written there, because then he would imagine God was referring to some other Martin Luther and not to him. But the Bible says, "*God so loved the world.*" That means everyone. The love of God is a fact, and so is Jesus' saving work. But knowing it is for you is a matter of faith.

This faith is worked in you by the Holy Spirit. He has given you the gift of forgiveness and life wrapped up in the person of the Christ. That little Babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, was given for you, to save you. As the angel told the shepherds, the "*good tidings of great joy*," the news of Jesus' birth, is "*to all people*" – for all people. Jesus is born for you! Let us then join together in singing, "Rejoice, Rejoice This Happy Morn!" (#142):

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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Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child,
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled,
Within my heart, that it may be
A quiet chamber kept for Thee. Amen. (ELH #123, v. 13)

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 dwells in us and we in Him, dear fellow redeemed:

What we have before us in these first few verses of the Gospel of John is a summary of all things that are. These verses tell us about God and creation, about God's plan to save the world from sin, about how this plan was carried out, and what it all means for you and me.

The Apostle John, by inspiration, began this Gospel with a nod toward the very first verse in the Old Testament. Genesis 1:1 says, "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*" John now tells us more about this God. "*In the beginning was the Word,*" he writes, "*and the Word was with God.*" This is not a reference to the LORD's ability to speak. John continues, "*and the Word was God. He – this One – was in the beginning with God.*" So the one eternal God, the God who is one in substance or essence – He consists of more than one Person.

The Bible clearly states that the one God is three Persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. "*The Word,*" who "*was in the beginning with God,*" is a reference to God the Son, who participated in creation with the Father and the Holy Spirit. In fact, nothing in the universe that has been made was made without the Son. "*All things were made through Him,*" writes John. When Genesis describes God speaking His creation into being – "*Let there be light,*" and so on – this is God the Son at work by the direction of the Father.

No light was given and no life was created except through the Son. At the end of those six days of creation, when God concluded His inaugural work, He looked at all He had made and

declared it to be *very good*" (Gen. 1:31). Everything was perfect. But it did not stay that way. God had given the angels and man the free opportunity to live with Him in His glory and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. But He did not force them to do this. He wanted them to serve Him gladly and without compulsion.

One of the chief angels chose otherwise, and he enticed others of them to join him in rebellion against their Creator. Of course they could not defeat Him. So they turned their attention toward the pinnacle of God's creation. The devil tempted the first man and woman to join him in his wickedness, and they agreed. They disobeyed God, which caused the whole world to fall under the curse of sin. Mankind had exchanged the bright, warm light of the living God for darkness and death.

God had every right to pour out His wrath upon them. But He still loved them. He did not want them to die eternally. He promised to send a Savior, the Seed of a woman, who would crush the head of Satan (Gen. 3:15). Thousands of years passed before the angel Gabriel was sent from God to visit a virgin named Mary. Mention of her sexual history was important because she would bear a Son in a most miraculous way. God the Holy Spirit would conceive a Child in her womb apart from any contact with a man. The prophecy regarding the Seed of the woman had come to pass.

In order to give notice of the arrival of Mary's special Son, the LORD sent John the Baptizer to prepare the people for His coming. John bore witness about this *"true Light... coming into the world."* "Here is the Son of God!" said John, "He is here to save the world!" (Jn. 1:29). How amazing! The Light-Giver, the Life-Maker, had stepped down from the heavens into human flesh! The eternal God who has no beginning and no end, now began His life in the world as the son of a poor woman.

What was the purpose of His coming? What did He need to take a look at with human eyes that He did not know from heaven? He did not come because there was something He did not know. He came because of what He *already knew*. God knew that all people would perish eternally if He did not save them. They could not save themselves. They were not perfect—far from it—, and nothing but a perfect creature could stand in the heavenly presence of God. So God became Man.

But when He became Man, He came humbly. His divine nature was hidden to the eyes of men. They saw only a little baby and then a teenager and then a man. Even after He began His public teaching and performed numerous miracles, many would not see Him as He should have been seen—as the promised Savior. This is why John says, *"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."* Never had something more significant or someone more important entered the world. But many shrugged it off; such is the sad state of unbelief.

Jesus, for His part, carried on. He said to the people, *"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.... For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day"* (Jn. 6:38,40). No amount of rejection, no stubborn unbelief, would discourage Him from the work His Father had given Him to do. He bowed to His Father's will all the way to the cross, where

He paid in blood the price of mankind's lawlessness. There, He suffered the eternal torments of death and hell for all sin, for sins committed since the fall of Adam and Eve and stretching forward to the Day of Judgment. The atonement for sin and death was complete; it was finished.

But how would sinners learn about this? How would they know what had been done for them? They would have to be reborn. Once they were birthed into the world of darkness; now they must be birthed into the kingdom of light. This would come about *"not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."* God does the regenerating. God gives rebirth. And He does it through His Son. He does it through the Word.

When His Word comes to our ears by the power of the Holy Spirit, it wakes us up. It wakes us from our aimless wandering. It opens our eyes to the light. Christ breathes into our souls the breath of life. Our sinful hearts begin to beat with His love. Our sinful flesh is washed with His cleansing blood. *"[T]he Word became flesh and dwelt among us,"* and through faith worked in us by the Means of Grace, He now dwells in us.

This is how God's saving work becomes yours. It comes to you through the Word. Jesus brings His healing presence right to your dead heart, so that your heart of stone becomes a heart of flesh (Ez. 36:25-26). And He keeps coming because your sinful nature, the old Adam, is still with you. You need Jesus' life-giving presence or else you will die forever. God does not want that to happen. You are His child through Baptism. He gave you that right in those saving waters. He intends for you to inherit all the glories that are now His.

When that heavenly era begins, then you will witness firsthand what the evangelist John beheld. Then you will see your Savior's glory, *"glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."*

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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