

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Last night it was all sweetness and sentiment. Newborn infants do that to us. Mary “gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger” (Luke 2:7). What a tender story! But there’s more to this story than tenderness. We also heard the angels last night proclaim that this Savior born in Bethlehem is “Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). He is Christ, the long-promised “ruler in Israel” (Mic. 5:2). He is “the Lord.” He is the Yahweh, the LORD, the name of God given to Moses, who would deliver, that is, rescue, that is, save the people of Israel from slavery.

Today this theme is continued, not amidst last night’s sentiment, but in the majesty of eternity and in the surprise of the infinite entering into the finite. That is, today’s theme is the second greatest mystery of the Christian faith, the incarnation of God, the greatest mystery being the mystery of the Trinity.

But let’s not get ahead of ourselves. “*The Word became flesh,*” comes toward the end of our reading today. John doesn’t begin there. He begins by establishing just who this ὁ λόγος (see the front of your bulletin), who this Word is.

John begins by telling us that ὁ λόγος, the Word, already WAS in the beginning. That tells us a lot, for remember, Genesis 1 begins, “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*” (Gen. 1:1). So, whoever the Word is, He is not a part of the created world. In fact, John goes on to say a bit later that “*all things came to pass through*” this Word. And lest anyone misunderstand what “*all things*” means, John restates it, “*apart from Him there has come to pass not one thing.*” Paul echoes this truth, “*by him [that is, by Christ] all things were created*” (Col. 1:16).

John continues, “*And the Word was with God.*” There is a distinction of persons being made here—the Word and the Father are two distinct persons of the Holy Trinity. This is a distinction made more explicit a bit later when John says, “*we have seen his glory, [the Word’s glory,] glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*” There is a relationship being expressed here—of the Father and the Son, not “with” spacially but with the Father in essence and will, for the Word is One with the Father—eternally—as Jesus would later say, “*I and the Father are one*” (John 10:30).

And yet, the Word is not the Father, as John expresses in the next phrase, “*And the Word was God.*” The Word is Himself God, and yet not the Father. At the end of this Christmas Gospel text John explains: “*No one has ever seen God,*” that is, God the Father. But “*the only God, who is at the Father’s side*”; that God must surely be the Son. The “*the only God, who is at the Father’s side,*” is the Word whom John already said back in verse 1 is God.

Now John doesn’t explore what was happening with the Word and the Father before the beginning. He does tell us what the Word did as God at the beginning. He participated in the creation, and this He did as the Word before the incarnation.

But Paul tells us that God had our salvation in mind even before He created the world: “*the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world*” (Eph. 1:3-4). This, too, would happen through the agency of the beloved Son. It was “*according to the purpose of [the Father’s] will,*” Paul says, that “*he has blessed us in the Beloved.*” Indeed, the Father purposed to send His own Son to give us “*redemption through his blood,*” to give us “*the forgiveness of our trespasses*” in Him (Eph. 1:5-7).

Thus, it was necessary that the Word become flesh. It was necessary for him who “*was in the form of God ... [to empty] himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men*” (Phil. 2:6-7), for apart from this humiliation as a starting point, our salvation is fantasy. As Gregory of Nazianzus wrote, “that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved” (Gregory of Nazianzus, “To Cledonius the Priest Against Apollinarius”). And that’s how we confess it: in Christ, humanity is assumed into God (Athanasian Creed), all so that He might win for us “*redemption though his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.*”

This is how Gregory describes the person of Christ, true God who became man: “For we do not sever the Man from the Godhead, but we lay down as a dogma the Unity and Identity of Person, Who of old was not Man but God, and the Only Son before all ages, unmingled with body or anything corporeal”—this is the Word before the incarnation. He continues “but Who in these last days has assumed Manhood also for our salvation; [able to suffer] in His Flesh, [but not] in His Godhead; [finite] in the body, [but not] in the Spirit; at once earthly and heavenly, tangible and intangible, comprehensible and incomprehensible; that by One and the Same Person, Who was perfect Man and also God, the entire humanity fallen through sin might be created anew.” (ibid).

This is what John came to understand in his three year vicarage with Jesus; this is what he perceived: that the Word becoming flesh, and in that flesh being lifted up on a cross and laid in death in a grave, was His glory to the joy of all creation. It’s God grace to us. It’s the truth of our redemption in Him.

Jesus, the eternal Word, was made flesh once, but is now united with it forever; He remains the Incarnate One. And He was wounded and died once for all. But His grace continues to flow from His wounds to His church. The Word makes the Father known—even accessible as we receive this Word in faith—such that the Father still today calls us His children, born of God by Holy Baptism,. And the Word favors us today to come to the table He has prepared, to eat His Divine flesh and to drink of His blood once shed for our forgiveness, and to depart in peace with God. So, come. Eat and drink. And rejoice in your salvation accomplished in the Word of God made flesh.

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.