

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

I began last night by talking about a shallow kind of spirituality that one finds on the internet, some perhaps in a virtual world like Zuckerberg's new metaverse, others on places like TikTok with millions following the shaman of their choice. I contrasted that with the deep and expansive theology of Christianity.

Last night our texts reached back to Adam and Eve in the Garden immediately after their fall into sin, to God's promised rescue, and those texts recounted the fulfillment of the promises in the birth of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Today, our texts take us back even further, back to the beginning, when there was nothing save God Himself — Father, Word, and Holy Spirit.

Although some today question the existence of God, most people are perfectly reasonable. They know of God because God has shown Himself to them in creation: *"his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made"* (Rom. 1:20).

No, the question for most people has always been about Jesus — who is He? What does He have to do with God? And that's the question that Christmas answers, especially our Gospel text from John 1, for John begins at the beginning and with the Word. *"In the beginning was the Word"* — not created, not made; before anything was made, He simply was.

Moreover, *"the Word was with God"* say most of our translations. But, what does that mean, we Lutherans might say? Spatially? How? Bill Weinrich translates the Greek clause "the Word was turned toward God," identifying a relationship with God, one that we find out shortly is as *"the only Son from the Father."* We also heard the writer to the Hebrews recite a litany of psalms all bearing witness to the loving relationship of God the Father with His Son — begotten, eternal, holy, righteous. Thus, in the Nicene Creed, hammered out in the midst of the Jesus controversies of the early centuries, we confess our faith in "one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds." Can't you just hear John 1 in those creedal words?

John isn't done: *"and the Word was God."* Surely, this follows from what had been said earlier, but John here affirms it: the preexistent Word, who is God's only-begotten Son, is God Himself. Thus again, in the Nicene Creed, we proceed to identify Jesus as "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God," not a lesser being, but of the same being with the Father.

John continues, *"All things were made through him [that is, through the Word], and without him was not [one] thing made."* This saying reinforces that which was just said, for if the Word is the creator, that means the Word is God, for remember, we

perceive God “*in the things that have been made*” (Rom. 1:20). And again referring to our universal confession in the Nicene Creed, Jesus is “of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.” And if Jesus made all things, that means that He Himself is not made. We confess: He is “begotten not made.”

More than that, the Word being God testifies to the way God works in the world, that is, through speaking. So it was in Genesis; when God created the world and everything in it, He did it by speaking: “*And God said, ‘Let there be ...’ ... and there was ... and it was so*” (Gen. 1:3, 6-7, 9). The Psalmist affirms it: “*For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm*” (Ps. 33:9).

So it was with Jesus when He spoke to unclean spirits: “*Be silent, and come out of him*” (Mark 1:25), and it was so; when He spoke to a man afflicted with leprosy: “*I will; be clean*” (Mark 1:41), and it was so; when He spoke to a man with useless legs: “*I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home*” (Mark 2:11), and it was so; when He spoke to the wind and sea: “*Peace! Be still*” (Mark 4:39), and it was so; when He spoke to the dead girl: “*Little girl, I say to you, arise*” (Mark 5:51), and it was so.

Jesus restored her life, for this is especially the thing the Word does — He gives life. Now this is not exactly like you heard it this morning, but this is the way Bill Weinrich translates the end of verse 3 and verse 4: “*What has come to pass in him was life, and the life was the Light of men.*” This is who Jesus is; “*I am ... the life*” (John 14:6), He says. The Father “*has granted the Son also to have life in himself*” (John 5:26). “*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly,*” Jesus said (John 10:10). “[*These words*] *are 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).

Now, we know that in order to give us life, the “*true light*” Himself would have to experience darkness — the author of life would have to experience death. Thus, John tells us that “*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,*” for there was no other way for this to happen than by God becoming mortal. As the Cappadocian Church Father Gregory of Nazianzus proclaimed: “that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved” (“*Critique of Apollinarius and Apollinarianism,*” Epistle 101, earlychurchtexts.com). The Word had to take on weak and mortal flesh of man in order that He might save mankind.

Last night, the mechanism for becoming mortal was on full display. In the fullness of time, the Holy Spirit conceived in a virgin “*the Son of the most High*” (Luke 1:32), and nine months later, that virgin gave birth to a Son, Christ our Lord. This Son, glorifying the Father by His obedience, was lifted up unto death on a cross. And what glory was on display for the world to see and draw near. The sinless Son of

God hung there until lifeless, the sheep silent before its shearers, the lamb led to the slaughter, was sacrificed unto death for our sins.

But the darkness could not overcome the light. Death did not conquer life. Life and light were victorious, and from His flesh now flow grace and truth through His church. For the Word speaks over you as the baptismal waters pour over you, and empowered by His death and resurrection, you become God's child, "*born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God,*" and you are "*united with [Christ] in a death like his,*" so that you "*shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his*" (Rom. 6:5) — this is grace and truth.

The Word speaks to His church still through your pastors with the promise: the "*one who hears you hears me*"; and when they preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins in [Jesus'] name according to His command, you can be sure that the Word is speaking, and it is so — more grace and truth. The Word speaks also to His church adding the Word made flesh to bread and wine. Here in this Sacrament you know is the incarnate one who gave up His own body and poured out His own blood unto death for you, now feeding you, now forgiving you, now strengthening you in faith and love — still more grace and truth.

O what a great mystery this all is — mysterious, but not inaccessible. The Lord of the Universe, the creator of all things came down to heaven as a little baby boy born of a virgin, laid in a manger. O what great love this is, that the Lord of Lords should humble Himself into our flesh, making Himself our servant, humbling Himself unto death, even death on a cross. O what wonders are the Word and Sacraments, that the Lord should give us in this way what He earned for us by His sacrificial death. O what great joy we have as the Spirit moves us to faith in the Word made flesh and to love of one another.

"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways. ... For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever." (Rom. 11:33, 36).

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