

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Like many other festivals in the Christian calendar, Christmas is a festival of contrasts. Last night Luke time-stamped the coming of the “*Savior, who is Christ the Lord*” (Luke 2:11). He was born of His virgin mother in Bethlehem because a registration had been ordered by Caesar Augustus. Which one? Why the first one, done when Quirinius was governor of Syria! John, on the other hand, transports us back to the unbounded vastness of eternity, to the beginning when the Word already was, to the Word who was with God and was God Himself.

The coming of the Savior in Luke is shrouded in hardship — a virgin mother has to travel to an ancestral home to be registered — and in humility — the mother gives birth to her Son in humble surroundings and lays Him on a bed of hay in a manger. The Savior comes in weakness, subject to His created surroundings. In John, the divine Word is revealed with power as He who brings all things into being. He resides in the bosom of the Father, and He reigns over all things.

In Luke, when the Savior is born, the glory of the Lord shone not about Him, but about God's messenger, come to bring the good news of great joy. In John, the Word Himself is life, and He is light, an unquenchable, unconquerable light, the true light for the world.

In Luke, the scene is tender and sentimental and mundane. In John, it is divine and majestic and filled with a bit of mystery. In Luke, Mary was told to name her Son, Jesus. In John, we're told of the Word, but who is He? He is unnamed. Clearly, He is God, but what is His name? He is called the Son, but not of Mary. Rather, He is “*the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.*”

What a contrast! And yet, in the middle of both of these texts, there is a convergence. The angel calls this little baby wrapped up tightly in His swaddling cloths: “*Christ, the Lord.*” He is the Lord, Yahweh, who delivered Israel of Old from their bondage. He is Jesus, the “*Lord Saves,*” come to save His people from their sins. And He is the Lord incarnate — the Word become flesh — come to bestow grace upon grace, come to lighten the darkness of our sin.

Here in this little baby, Immanuel, “*all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell*” (Col. 1:19). He is the eternally begotten Son of God, “*begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, of the same substance with the Father by whom all things were made*” (Nicene Creed); and He is true man, “*conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary*” (Apostles' Creed), the eternal Son of God receiving flesh from “*the substance of His mother*” (Athanasian Creed). Jesus: true God and true man ... this article is part of the orthodox faith that is “*necessary for everlasting salvation*” (Athanasian Creed).

The Son of God came down from the Father's side to enter into our world by becoming one with us. He became our brother, we hear — like us in every respect except for sin (Heb. 2:17), that He might become the perfect atoning sacrifice for us, "*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29). Yes, by partaking of our flesh and blood, He made Himself subject to death, and by submitting Himself to the death of the cross, He reconciled all things to Himself, making for us peace on earth and peace in heaven (Col. 1:20).

Our brotherhood with Jesus, however, does not imply that everything will be fine in our own families. We still sin against one another in our families; we fail them; we spread falsehoods about them; we hurt them by our words and actions. We are often estranged from each other. That's what sin does, for that's what sin did in Paradise; our sin estranged us from our God. But God was not happy with that situation, and He would not fail us. He sent His own Son as our brother, as we heard, to reconcile us to Himself.

You've heard the proverb, I'm sure, that "blood is thicker than water." Perhaps that's true, but, because of sin, blood can become pretty thin between family members, while God's water and word establishes strong familial bonds. Truly, as important as our families are —and they are a heritage from Him —, yet Jesus certainly saw the familial bonds that God establishes with us as Jesus' brothers and sisters as stronger than blood (Mark 3:33-35). We are brothers and sisters in Christ.

And God's one and only Son becoming our brother also implies that we are now sons of God through faith in Christ, as John tells us: the Son has given us "*the right to become children of God.*" And that happens through water. In the waters of Holy Baptism, we are given a new birth — not a natural birth, but a birth from above, a birth from God. By this grace, we believe in the Son; we become new creations; we are in Christ, numbered among those who have received Him, who are being "*led by the Spirit of God*"; and so, St. Paul says, we are "*sons of God*" (Rom. 8:14). And "*if [we are] children,*" the apostle continues, "*then [we are] heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*" (Rom. 8:17).

And that gives us hope for what lies ahead. That little child of Bethlehem that came "from heav'n above [down] to earth" (LSB358:1), who came to bring peace, also gives hope ... the hope that comes with sonship — that we will one day receive our promised inheritance as sons (Matt. 25:34), that we will one day dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Ps. 23:6); that what we see now dimly, we will see then face to face; that the love of God, seen now only in part, made know to us in the face of a little child, made know to us by a head crowned with thorns, will be made fully known (1 Cor. 13:12).

Until then, let us continue to listen to those who bear witness to the light, to those who bring the good news of peace, and happiness, and salvation. Let us continue to receive God's grace and more grace — grace upon grace — the grace of Christ's body and blood for our forgiveness and life in addition to the grace of our Baptisms and the grace of His Word. And let us sing for joy at the good news of the Lord who has comforted His people through their redemption by His incarnate Son, the Word made flesh, a little child wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.

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