

In the name of ✠ Jesus Christ our Lord.

If we consider Luther's admonition that I quoted in my Christmas greeting in your bulletin, he would have us look at the human side of the Christmas story, to trust "Christ lying in the lap of his young mother." "There is no greater consolation given to mankind than this," Luther says, "that Christ became man, a child, a babe, playing in the lap and at the breasts of his most gracious mother." For in Him "is overcome the power of sin, death, hell, conscience and guilt."

And so, last night we did just that. We considered the child as we read: "*the time came for [Mary] to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger ....*" "[U]nto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

Luther also said, "*I would not have you contemplate the deity of Christ, the majesty of Christ, .... Divinity may terrify man. Inexpressible majesty will crush him.*" Yes, that's the result for unholy sinners in the presence of a holy God. That God said, "*man shall not see me and live.*"

Yet, how can we think on anything else with the majesty of John's Gospel before us today: "*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 Word is God, and yet, John too points us to the flesh, "*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.*"

These are glorious texts from the pens of St. Luke and St. John, and they provide us today the contrast between the fleshly and the Divine. The first speaks of the fullness of time; the second of incomprehensible eternity. The first tells us of the birth of a child in a very ordinary way, just as babies are delivered to this day; the second of the Word of God, without beginning, by whom all things were made. The first tells us of the birth of Mary's firstborn son, a babe of the flesh of Mary, who is held in Mary's lap; the second tells us of the only Son from the Father, who is of the same substance with the Father, "*begotten of Him, not made,*" who remains in the lap of His Father (v. 18). The first tells us of the low estate of this baby's birth with swaddling cloths and no crib for a bed, but a manger; the second tells us of His glory, the glory of Him who is full of grace and truth, who makes the heavenly Father known to us. The first says He is Savior, Christ the Lord; the second calls Him not just the Word and God, but the true Light, the light of men, in whom is life itself.

These are two glorious texts, texts speaking from different perspectives, but texts speaking of the same person—not a thing but a person, not an it, but a Him. He is the Son of the Father, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, not becoming a person by His birth, but a person from the beginning: *“All things were made through HIM, and without HIM was not any thing made that was made. In HIM was life....”* The Word is the eternal Son of God, who in time was made flesh and dwelt among us, “not by the conversion of the divinity into flesh but by the assumption of the humanity into God” (Athanasian Creed). The person of the Son was born in time as the Christ, God and man together in the “unity of person,” and “... *we have seen HIS glory,*” the Divine glory *“as of the only Son from the Father.”*

Truly by the time we get to the last verse in our Gospel text, that tells us that the Word of God became incarnate, it is no longer so much the contrast of flesh and Divinity, but the convergence that is the story. St. Paul says, *“the whole fullness of deity dwells [in Him] bodily.”* And both are necessary for our salvation. It was for us men and for our salvation that the immortal God took on our mortal flesh. We were His purpose in coming down from heaven, God Himself being born of the virgin Mary. Again, St. Paul, *“in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”*

Yes, it was for us, because of our need, that God humbled Himself unto death, the death of the cross, for it was man’s disobedience that brought sin into the world, and death through sin. It would take a man’s obedience to undo the awful consequences of sin. A man had to keep the law, but not just any man could do that — it took flesh empowered by the Word to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. It was man that transgressed God’s holy law, and it was necessary that punishment be meted out to a man. Yet only the Word who made all things and into whose hands the Father has given all things could endure a punishment capable of atoning for all sins of all people in all places for all time. It was man that brought corruption into the world; by a man also must come incorruption. Yet only by the Word, in whom is life itself, by His becoming flesh and dying, that God might effect a resurrection from the dead and so clothe the perishable with the imperishable, mortal man with immortality.

And it’s only in this man, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us, that life is restored to us men born dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). You see, not only are creation and redemption connected in this Word, but also re-creation—connected in Holy Baptism, water and the Word, as He gives rebirth to fallen humanity, sending forth the Spirit this time to hover over the baptismal waters. There He gives you *“the right to become children of God,” “born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”* In fact, He makes it so by this washing of regeneration and renewal. And you who have

received Him thus, who believe in His name, He has made you His children, even sons (Gal. 4:5, 7) and *“heirs according to the hope of eternal life”* Tit. 3:7).

This is what we celebrate on Christmas Day, with hearts and voices raising. Not either or—the flesh or the Divine—but both and—the Word that became flesh for us and for our salvation. What a wondrous gift—God’s own love for sinful creatures has come down at Christmas. So, come all ye faithful. Come and receive your Lord, highest most holy, light of light eternal, born of a virgin, a mortal He came. Come and receive the Word of the Father, once in flesh appearing, who by His blood redeemed you, who by water made you citizens of heaven. Come and receive Him who today comes again with His flesh and blood for you to eat and drink as a foretaste of your inheritance. Oh come, let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord.

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