

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Last night we heard the story of how Mary gave birth to her firstborn Son, wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger. We heard how God progressively unwrapped this gift during Jesus' time among us. Of course, Jesus died and was wrapped up again in His burial, but unwrapped in His resurrection, His grave cloths folded neatly in His grave. Birth and resurrection, it seems, go neatly together.

But gone are Mary and Joseph from our text today; gone is the baby, although there is something about being “born” in John's Gospel, and we certainly consider Jesus in the flesh; gone are the angels and shepherds in the Gospel text, although a comparison of the angels and the Son is found in the Epistle; gone is the calm and bright “Silent Night, Holy Night”; it's the daytime, and we're talking about the Sun of Righteousness.

Of course, those verses from Luke 2 are important. They place the Christmas events in time—it happened when Rome was in charge, when Caesar Augustus reigned, when Quirinius was governing Syria. They place the Christmas event in a certain place—it happened in Bethlehem, the city of David.

But John instructs us that the Christmas story goes back farther than Roman registrations and towns with no appropriate accommodations for a pregnant mother about to give birth; it goes back farther than angelic proclamations of the birth of a Savior, Christ the Lord or angelic annunciations that a virgin will conceive and bear a son; it goes back farther than prophetic pronouncements of a child to be born of David, of Abraham, of Eve.

Yes, the Christmas story extends back to the beginning, and, if you will, before the beginning, before the foundation of the world, for already in the beginning was the Word, the only Son of the Father, distinct from the Father, but of the same being as the Father.

Εγένετο, “it came to pass in those days,” we hear Luke say as he tells the story of Christmas, “it came to pass [εγένετο]... that the days were fulfilled,” and John tells us that “all things came to pass [εγένετο] through Him,” through the Word. The Word is God's Agent, Athanasius would call Him. If it has come to pass, from the creation of the world to the salvation of the world, it has come to pass through the Word, and nothing happens apart from the Word. Or as Athanasius wrote, “the One Father has employed the same Agent for both works, effecting the salvation of the world through the same Word Who made it in the beginning” (Athanasius, On the Incarnation).

In the beginning, light broke into the darkness and void of the earth as the Word spoke forth: “Let there be light.” And this light brought life, for that's what

the Word intended as He spoke the *“light of men”* into being, so that “what has come to pass in the Word is life.” And as the Word is always turned toward God the Father, so life in men was intended to be turned toward the Word.

But Satan, the *“Day Star, son of Dawn”* (Is. 14:12) desired that man’s eyes be turned toward his light and away from the true light. So man did as we succumbed to Satan’s darkness; man turned away from the true light. *“People [even] loved the darkness rather than the light”* (John 3:19), and so we suffered darkness and walked in the shadow of death.

But the darkness ultimately could not overcome the true Light. The true Light purposed to enter into the world, into that which He made, that He might remake it. He sent John as a forerunner of this Light, to bear witness to this Light, that men’s faces might be turned back to the Light, that men might have life again.

The true Light entered the world in time, coming to those to whom the promises had been given — through Eve, through Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, through David, conceived of God, born of a virgin — *“the Word became flesh.”* The dwelling place of God was in creation for a little while; the Word was *“made ... for a little while lower than the angels”* (Heb. 2:7) so that through Him we might receive the fullness of His grace and truth. The Word became flesh so that what was promised through Moses might come to pass in Jesus Christ — grace in place of grace, the grace of mere promise replaced with flesh and blood, concrete grace and truth of Christ Himself.

And this so that as we receive Him, we also might have the right to become God’s children once more, salvation won, life restored, as we look to the true Light, the Word made flesh. For not only birth, but also incarnation go together with resurrection. We receive the Incarnate One in a washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit — a rebirth by water and the Spirit — a rebirth *“to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”* (1 Pet. 1:3), a salvation received by baptism as *“an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”* (1 Pet. 3:21).

And having received Him, as His children you now get to eat at His table, and you get to feast on the food that endures to everlasting life, the very flesh that the Word took unto Himself. So, I know you’re saying it: “Let’s get to it, Pastor. We’re here to eat the flesh and blood of Him who created us and has saved us, the Incarnate One. We’re here today for the flesh and blood of Him who came as the babe of Bethlehem, born to the Virgin Mary, who came as Savior, Christ the Lord.” Me, too. So, come and feast on Him who is “of the Father’s Heart begotten,” the source of grace and truth, life and salvation.

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