

25 December 2004  
Christmas Day

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“In the Beginning”

Last night, we considered how Luke began his recording of the Christmas story. He said, **“It happened.”** History. Fact. Truth. Today we hear from St. John, who begins *his* version of the Christmas story at a different point. Whereas Luke goes back 2000 years or so, John goes back even farther. To eternity. **“In the beginning”** is how John begins. The very same words that begin the very first book of the Bible are the words that John now uses. And so John goes all the way back. Past Luke. Past Moses. Past creation. To God Himself. ***In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was made flesh.***

Or in other words, what happened in history had been decreed by God from eternity. Christmas was not “Plan B” for God. Sin was not a surprise. When Adam and Eve ate of the fruit, God did not have to call an emergency executive session in Heaven to decide, “Now what are we gonna do?” No, He knew. His people, His children, who had plunged themselves into sin, He would join. He would come down and be born in the very same world of sin. In the very same flesh. Under the very same Law and condemnation. To do what we could not. To keep the Law we could not keep. To pay the price for sin that we could not pay. To save us. And so He would come and bear the burden we chose instead of the freedom He gave. Rejection would be countered by love. Rebellion by mercy. Sin by forgiveness. **In the beginning** God so determined it, and at Christmas, He did it. And so the Son of God, the Word, the second person of the Holy Trinity, came down from Heaven and was made flesh. He became like us in every way, receiving His human nature from His mother Mary, while at the same time remaining true God. And as John tells us, the Son of God became a child of man, that we children of men might have ***“the right to become children of God, who [are] born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”***

But I ask you, which of those two is the greater miracle? That the Son of God came down and became flesh, or that we sinful children of flesh are made children of God? Well, that is actually not a proper question, for it is a false alternative. Those two miracles go together. They must. John tells us the second miracle is the reason for the first. . . . But perhaps we don’t think that way because we tend to underestimate the second – the miracle that we sinful children of flesh are made children of God in Christ Jesus. For the Word becoming flesh, yes! that is a great miracle! The miracle of Christmas, the virgin birth, the angels, and all of that. But what of us? And our new

birth, and faith, and being made children of God? That seems quite a bit more mundane, doesn't it? Perhaps commonplace. Maybe even something that we take for granted. And so to speak of that in miraculous terms seems a bit much – especially when compared to Jesus and Christmas! . . . But truly, these two miracles go together. And we will not understand either if we do not understand both.

And that is why John, in describing the birth of Jesus, also describes our situation. In the verses that we heard today, he describes both *together*. For they must go together.

And so what has John said? How does he describe Jesus' coming into this world? First he describes it by saying that ***“the light shines in the darkness.”*** For that is where we are. In the darkness. The darkness of sin, which breeds fear, trouble, anxiety, and uncertainty. The darkness of separation from God. The darkness which is the realm of evil and the Prince of Darkness. It is not a good place to be. Even though we've grown accustomed to it, and accepted it, and learned to get along in it, it is not a good place to be. But in this darkness, a great change has taken place. A light, John says, has come.

But what, then, of this light? John goes on to say that when this light (namely, Jesus) came into the world, ***“the world did not know Him.”*** Now that's a statement not so much about ignorance or lack of knowledge, as much as it is of rejection. Perhaps we could say, *“the world chose not to know Him.”* For once you get used to the darkness, and your eyes adjust, and your lifestyle adjusts, a bright light is not good news! It exposes you, it makes your eyes hurt, it changes things. And so the world, grown used to sin and darkness, does not want to know Him. Preferring instead the comfort of the darkness. The comfort of the usual. And this is to call the darkness *good* and the light *evil*.

And this attitude then results in the third statement John makes about Jesus' coming into this world: ***“He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.”*** And this is much more than simply *“no room at the inn”* stuff. When the light came into the world, the world sought to snuff out this light of God by hanging Him on the cross.

Now be clear: *all that* John describes in these verses is not just about *other* people, but also about you and me. The world includes us. The darkness we too have gotten used to, and gotten comfortable in. And the light of God, shining in our darkness and exposing us and our sin we don't like either. And when we choose sin, we are rejecting Him.

But as John would have us know, all of that is *exactly why* **the Word became flesh**. As hard and distressing as it may be to acknowledge and confess our sin, to do so is to speak the truth. It is to rightly call the *darkness* evil and the *light* good. And it is to receive

Him. To receive the Son of God come to us in the flesh. To receive His forgiveness, His light, His life, and His love. To receive Him as He wants to be received – not just as a baby in a manger, but as Saviour. As the One the darkness cannot overcome. As the eternal Son of God, who was **in the beginning** and who has no ending. Who became flesh, so that as children of God, we too could live a life that has no ending.

Now, is such a gift as that, such a rescue from darkness, such a change, a miracle? Truly, it can be nothing else. For as the Son of God being born in the flesh was a great miracle, so too is the Son of God being born in this flesh, in this heart, a great miracle. Both worked by the Holy Spirit. Both for my rescue and salvation. Both beyond our comprehension. And yet both true! What God decreed **in the beginning**, in eternity, has indeed happened in history. And you and I, in Holy Baptism, have become ***“children of God, born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God!”*** And when that happens, the Good News of Christmas then becomes not just history, but reality.

And this statement of reality is how John then concludes: ***“And 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.”*** And just as John saw His glory, so do we today. For though we today may not be able to see Jesus’ flesh and blood with our eyes, we have been given that which is even greater than sight, for here again this morning we will eat and drink His very body and blood. And His body and blood, once born in Bethlehem, hung on a cross, resurrected and ascended, will accomplish the same for us, leading us through death to life and *our* ascension into Heaven, and the life that has no ending. For the Word made flesh is still dwelling with us, in grace and truth. Dwelling with us in mercy and love. Dwelling with us, that we might dwell with Him.

***“In the beginning,”*** John says, ***“was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh.”*** God in the flesh. No wonder the angels couldn’t contain themselves, but had to sing out this wonderful news! ***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.”*** Yes, peace. The peace of God. The peace of sin forgiven. The peace which will have no end. Or as John might say: *as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen!*

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.