

“And so, It Begins, Because He Was”

John 1:1-18

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

A blessed Christmas morning to all as we gather to worship our newborn King, the Incarnate Word, the Son of the Living God. What tremendous joy we all feel during this Christmas season at the sight of the baby Jesus in the manger, Mary and Joseph adoring their child, the shepherds tending their flocks, and the angel choirs singing “Glory to God in the Highest!” The only begotten Son of God has taken on flesh and has been born in Bethlehem. The implications of this event are more impactful than any other thing that has happened to this point in history. This isn’t simply just another baby born to an impoverished family that is forced to sleep in a barn. It is the birth of the Savior of the world.

Many of you here this morning are parents and remember the joy of bringing a child into the world, though sometimes we all might wish we could send them back and just let Jesus deal with their shenanigans. That joy that you felt at the birth of your child is the same joy that was felt by Mary and Joseph, only with the implication of holding the living Word of God in their arms—the second person of the Trinity in real flesh and blood. To truly understand and grasp the magnitude of this moment, just as in most stories, we have to go all the way back to the beginning. In this case, the literal beginning of all things. And so, it begins, because He was.

The incarnated, eternal Word of God was. Well, you might be asking yourself, what was He? For the answer to that question, let’s look at what Lutheran theologian Paul E. Kretzmann says in his Popular Commentary for verse 1 of our text, “In the beginning was the Word, not: came the word, or: was brought into existence, but: existed, had been in existence since the timeless reaches of eternity...He (Jesus) is the Word which God spoke from eternity, begotten of God from eternity.” The Son of God, begotten of the Father from eternity, was, and has always been. You will find many among the Christian church who try to explain away this truth. How can it be that the Father begat the Son, but the Son always existed? Our sinful human mind simply can’t comprehend this idea. Something HAD to come first, just like the old chicken or the egg conundrum. As Lutherans, we are content to say (through God’s gracious gift of faith) that we believe the words of Scripture. So, we point those confused souls to Scripture passages like 1 Corinthians 2:16, “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct Him?”

Thus, we turn again to the words of Scripture in Genesis, chapter 1, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said...” The threefold Godhead is present at and before the beginning of all things. Within the first three verses of Genesis, we see God and each person of the Trinity: The Holy Spirit hovering over the waters, the Father speaking the words of creation, and the Son being the literal Word of creation. “And God said” is repeated again and again on each day of creation, and that statement is the action of the Father, breathing out the Word, His only begotten Son, to create all things. That Word breathed out by the Father is the reason we gather here this morning. That Word, eternal and almighty, became flesh to enter the world as a perfect man for our salvation. And so, it begins, because He was.

He WAS BORN to begin the story of the salvation of the world through His suffering, death, and resurrection out of the tomb on the third day. Being both true God, and true man, the infant Jesus begins his journey to the cross in perfect obedience to the Law, something you and I are wholly incapable of doing. As we ponder the perfection of the Word made flesh, it brings squarely into focus the reality of our sinful, imperfect flesh in this world. We deserve nothing more than to be lost and condemned sinners, and if we fail to focus on the Word in the Flesh, and spend all our time on this flesh in the world, we are no better off than the lost souls wandering in darkness with no hope of finding the light of salvation.

This world is a place for the sinful flesh to thrive. Especially during this season, the secular focus on Christmas is all about some of our favorite pet sins: those of covetousness, greed, and self-aggrandizement. We get laser-focused on the grand decorations and want to make sure that our houses keep up with the neighbors. We check every bulb, untie every knot, and get lucky not to break our necks falling off the ladder, all to make sure that we are the center of attention in the neighborhood, only to find out that all they notice is that the little lights aren’t twinkling. The gifts begin to pile up, and up, and up. We make sure that every kid has the same number of presents, and then we, and the kids, greedily count them to make sure there’s “enough” to have a good Christmas, only to find out that there is never enough to satisfy our lusts. We see the people around us out shopping, getting all of their heart’s desires, and we wish we could have what they are getting. We focus on what we wish we had, only to find out that our covetous desires have forced us to neglect our own spiritual needs.

Those sinful desires make Christmas all about us, and Satan uses these sins to turn our flesh in this world away from the real message and truth of Christmas, the reality of

the Word in the flesh—the babe born in Bethlehem. When these sins creep up on all of us, and they will, we are taught to turn from them in repentance, and forgiveness is ours because of the grace and mercy of our loving God. Our flesh can do no good apart from His grace, as Paul says in Romans 7:18, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.” Christ Jesus, the Incarnate Word, became flesh to serve the purpose of salvation for all of humanity and to make our inability to do what is right irrelevant to His plan for salvation. And that is accomplished only through the forgiveness He would win for us by His death on the cross. The Word in the flesh reminds us that His suffering and death were substituted for that which we deserve because of our sin. The holy and innocent Son of God, begotten of the Father from eternity, bled, died, and rose again to give us the gift of everlasting life and salvation. And so it begins, because He was.

He WAS CRUCIFIED to begin the absolute certainty of our everlasting life through His death and resurrection. Through faith, we received this glorious gift in our baptisms, and the reality of all those sinful desires we talked about earlier is that they have been washed away in the blood of the Lamb. Our goal in this life is not to defeat our sinful flesh through our own power, but to walk with Christ, the Word made flesh. He already defeated this worthless, sinful body that we inhabit when He gave up His own flesh to become salvation for us, thus giving us the hope of eternal perfection in our own flesh at the end of all things. All those sins were taken upon Him, and He defeated them and every sin that has ever been or ever will be. That is the power of the Son of God Incarnate, born of a virgin in a lowly manger.

It is easy for us to get lost in the fact of our unworthiness before God, and forget that we do in fact have a purpose in this sinful flesh. While it is our absolute and ultimate goal to one day be with our Lord in His heavenly glory, we can't neglect the responsibility He has placed before us while we are here. This joyous news of Christmas needs to be told to all those people who are lost in the darkness. Paul says to the church at Philippi in Philippians 1:23b-24, "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account." We must use this imperfect flesh, given as a gift from God, to spread the good news of Christ's Gospel. That is more necessary on account of every believer around you, and every lost and condemned sinner who has not heard or understood the message of God's saving grace. And in this time of darkness and tribulation, just as the Apostles were witness to the resurrected Christ, we share the good news that we can still find the presence of our Lord and Savior for comfort in these times. And so, it is finished, because He IS.

He IS HERE, present with us in the Means of Grace where He has promised to be. He is the Word which became flesh, and He dwelt among us, and still comes to us in Word and in Sacrament. The Word Incarnate comes to us first and foremost through the Holy Spirit in the Scripture. The Old Testament prophecy of the Savior in Isaiah 11:4 says this, “but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of his lips He shall kill the wicked.” Christ Jesus suffered and died, and with His last breath He uttered, “It is finished.” With those words He killed the power that wickedness held over His creation, rendering the salvific verdict of everlasting life for all who believe in Him. Again, that is why we gather on this Christmas morning, to celebrate the Word made flesh, the incarnate, eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ. Because He became flesh, he also became sin for us, that through His death He might “strike the earth with the rod of His mouth”, declaring that all have been given freedom from sin and death through Him and His sacrifice on the cross. What joy that brings, that we might receive that which we do not deserve on behalf of our loving Savior!

He also comes to us physically in His real presence in the Lord’s Supper. We will soon come up to this table, invited by God Himself, to partake of His body and blood which He gave and shed for us all on the bloody cross of salvation. In one of his more famous moments of the Reformation, Dr. Martin Luther was debating one of his opponents on the Lord’s Supper. Now, while you have all probably heard this before, I hope that the message this morning helps this hit home just a little bit more. In his response to his opponents saying that the body and blood of Christ are merely represented in the supper, Dr. Luther simply wrote in the dust of the table the word “IS.” We believe the Words spoken by the Word. Jesus said, “This IS my body...This IS my blood.”

The Apostles and disciples were present with our Savior and could touch, feel, and eat with the Lord of Hosts. We too have that privilege in the Sacrament: to touch, feel, and eat with Jesus Christ, with the saints, and the whole host of heaven that has gone before us, singing as the angels did on Christmas Eve, “Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!” (Lk 2:14). We celebrate this feast because He has accomplished all things for us, so that despite our sinful nature we might be redeemed and washed in His blood, through our rebirth into His death and resurrection in the waters of baptism.

Titus 2:11 says, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.” This is why the Christ child was born. He was born to deliver the world from the bonds of sin and death, and He accomplished that through His death and resurrection, and now He sits at the right hand of God in glory, and dwells within each one of us. We

have seen His glory, full of grace and truth, in the words of Scripture and in the Sacraments. He has accomplished all for us, bringing salvation for all people. And because of that truth, though our flesh will die in this world, we will dwell in spirit with our heavenly Father, until that day when Christ returns to raise our flesh to perfect life and reunite soul and body in eternal joy. That is His Christmas promise to each and every one of you. And so, it is finished, just as it began, because HE WAS, because HE IS, and because HE WILL ALWAYS BE. Amen.