

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Christmas Day, December 25, 2012

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 98, 79, 99, 76, 94.

Lessons: Isaiah 9:2-7, Hebrews 1:1-12, Luke 2:1-20.

Sermon Text: John 1:14-18

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear Friends in Christ:

Christmas is a time when we hear some amazing truths about Jesus. They are clearly recorded in the Bible, but are based on this incomprehensible fact: The eternal Son of God also became a true man. The incarnation of God's Son is an amazing, incomprehensible divine mystery. Paul wrote: ***"Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh."*** (I Tim. 3:16)

Since this is what Christmas is all about, isn't it a shame that the festival is celebrated in such a thoughtless way? Some observe Christmas as just another holiday with time off from work, time to eat and drink and celebrate. Others think of Jesus' birth in a sentimental way, thinking only of a cute baby born in Bethlehem, but ignore the fact that this was the eternal Son of God. Countless thousands observe Christmas simply in an outward way with the emphasis on spending, decorating, eating and celebrating. Meanwhile the spiritual truths of Christmas, the real facts, are ignored.

We believe that the Christmas facts are so essential, so important, that they dare not be ignored. We want to concentrate on them in our worship today as we consider

THE INCOMPARABLY PRECIOUS FACTS OF CHRISTMAS.

- 1. The eternal Word became flesh and dwelt among us;**
- 2. Through him we have a superabundant supply of grace to cover all our sins; and,**
- 3. Through him we have the truth about God revealed to us.**

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." This is how John speaks to us of Jesus' incarnation. It sounds strange to us to hear a person referred to as the WORD. John is the only one of the writers of the Bible that the Holy Spirit moved to describe Jesus as the eternal Word. When John speaks of Jesus in his first Epistle, he calls him ***"the Word of Life."*** (I John 1:1) When John wrote Revelation, he said of Jesus: ***"His name is the Word of God."*** (Rev. 19:13)

Why Jesus is called the eternal Word is not hard to understand. Words express truths, words reveal, words describe. So Jesus as the Word is the One in whom God describes Himself. Jesus is the One through whom God is revealed. Jesus as the Word is the One through whom God manifested Himself to the world. That's why Jesus could say: ***"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."*** (John 14:9) Again He said: ***"No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."*** (Matt. 11:27)

Why Jesus is called the eternal Word is made clear in the first words of this Gospel: ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning."*** (John 1:1-2) This was also the testimony of John the Baptist as the Evangelist John says in our text: ***"John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, 'This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'"*** Luther explained John's testimony in this way: "Thus here St. John wants to say: 'This man, Christ, was before me. He lived before I had my being. Yes, He also existed before His own mother was born. In other words, He was God from eternity; for the angels also existed before Mary, but

Christ preceded all the angels, yes, all creatures." (Luther's Works, Vol. 22, p. 129) In point of time, John the Baptist was born about 6 months before Jesus was born in Bethlehem. But Jesus as the Son of God existed from eternity. Therefore, John says that Jesus *"is preferred before me,"* that is, in preference of rank. Not only is Jesus before John, but before all created things, for John says: *"Through him all things were made: without him nothing was made that has been made."* (John 1:3) So we also confess in the Nicene Creed that we believe in Jesus "the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made."

This eternal Word *"became flesh and dwelt among us."* John does not mention the conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit or being born of the Virgin Mary. He emphasizes the deity of Jesus. Though John does not describe how Jesus became a man, he clearly says that he did in the words: *"The Word became flesh."* This is the divine mystery that remains incomprehensible to our minds. The church fathers have expressed this mystery in these words: "He did not cease to be what He was, but He became what He had not been before." (Ylvisaker's Gospels, p. 49) When Jesus was born, He did not cease to be God. As God he also assumed the human nature. He also became a true man, flesh of our flesh, with a true body and soul. Paul also wrote that God sent *"his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering."* (Rom. 8:3) In every respect Jesus was true Man, only without sin. He ate, drank, slept, wept, suffered and died.

The Bible says: *"We have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin."* (Hebr. 4:15) He *"dwelt among us,"* John says. He lived here on this earth into his 34th year. In this way he partook of all the joys and sorrows of human existence.

Speaking of the disciples, John says: *"We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."* As a true Man Jesus possessed the supernatural glory as only the only-begotten Son of God could. This glory was manifested in Jesus' miracles, in his words and actions. He gave evidence that he was almighty, that he knew all things, and that he was present everywhere at once.

This Jesus, the eternal Word who became flesh, is *"full of grace and truth,"* John says. We want to learn now that through him we have a superabundant supply of grace to cover all our sins.

2.

John says in our text: *"And of His fullness we have all received, and, grace for grace."* *"Grace for grace"* means a superabundance of grace, inexhaustible riches of grace. Grace is God's undeserved gift of love in Christ. Paul writes: *"In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will - to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves."* (Eph. 1:4-6) Again God's grace is expressed in these words: *"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* (John 3:16)

The grace already given to us by the heavenly Father in his Son is a pledge, so to speak, of the ever-new supplies of his grace. These supplies will never be exhausted. This fact becomes more meaningful to us when we remember that God's purpose in the eternal Word becoming flesh was for our salvation. We needed a Savior, for without him we would be lost forever in hell. We are sinners. We were conceived and born in sin, and we sin daily. We break God's Commandments in thought, word and deed.

Though we deserve only God's punishment, he has graciously given us his own Son to become true Man so that he might suffer and die for our sins. John says: *"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."* (I John 2:2) This fact is the chief reason for our joy at Christmas time. We poor, helpless sinners have a Savior from sin. Even though we in weakness often fall into sin, there is a never-ending supply of grace. Paul says: *"Where sin increased, grace increased all the more."* (Rom. 5:20) Jesus is the reason why the holy God is merciful to us and forgives us all our sins.

O let us not fail to show our appreciation for God's undeserved love in Christ our Savior by forsaking our sinful ways and by living according to his Commandments and joyfully serving him in our everyday life.

John in our text adds another precious fact for our Christmas joy. Through Jesus we have the truth about God revealed to us.

John writes: ***“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.”*** Moses was the Old Testament leader of Israel through whom God gave his Law. The Law makes impossible demands on us. It gives us nothing. It is good and holy because it comes from God, but its main purpose is to reveal our sin. Grace and truth comes only through Jesus and is proclaimed in the Gospel. The Gospel demands nothing of us, but gives us as a free gift all that is necessary for our salvation. The whole truth that has to do with our salvation has been revealed to us through Christ.

“No one has ever seen God,” John says. No one can see him face to face and live. Even Moses saw only a reflection of God's glory on Mt. Sinai. The only way we can really see God is through Jesus. As far as Jesus' person is concerned, the Bible says: ***“The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.”*** (Hebr. 1:3) As far as Jesus' work is concerned, he is the revealer of God to man, in addition, of course, to being our Redeemer. The truth about God and the truth from God is revealed only through Jesus Christ. The truth that has to do with our salvation is revealed only through Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the true God from eternity. He has been with the Father from eternity, and knows all things. In Christ, Paul says, ***“are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”*** (Col. 2:3) He can, therefore reveal the truth we need to know from God. This is because Jesus, our text says, ***“is in the bosom of the Father.”*** That's a way of expressing his most intimate association with the Father. Listen to Jesus' words telling of his intimate association with the Father. ***“No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven - the Son of Man.”*** (John 3:13) John said of Jesus: ***“The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God.”*** (John 3:31, 32, 34) Jesus also said: ***“No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father,”*** (John 6:46)

Thus the truth we need to know about our salvation is revealed by Jesus in his Word, the Holy Bible. In that Word Jesus says: ***“My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”*** (John 6:40) This is true and we can be sure of it because the Bible says: ***“God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”*** (Col. 1:19-20)

May this be what we believe. May this be our Christmas joy, even as we sing of it in the Christmas hymn: "Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled." Amen. (Hymn 94)

(Ministry By Mail Sermon for December 25, 1986 by Pastor M. H. Eibs. Revised by Robert Mehlretter)