

## Exordium for the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord

Dear Faithful, who have come to celebrate the birth... and death of Jesus, the Christ,

I was reminded just the other day of our recent refurbishment project this past year, when one of our members who has been away to college since summer was surprised. It's not that I had forgotten all the work that had gone into the project (the removal of the carpet, the new paint, the refinished pews), but that already, I have grown accustomed to seeing it as it currently is.

But there is another key alteration that was made that I haven't mentioned, yet. Probably the one that is most surprising, that, perhaps, leaves the biggest impression. The crucifix that now hangs above the Altar. The cross has not changed, but now a rather arresting corpus, or body, hangs on the cross.

There are some who, at least initially, consider such an image a form of idolatry. But I wonder, how many of these same people have no problem, even enjoy, putting up a nativity set at Christmas? For there, unless the manger lies empty, is an image of the same Jesus that is up there. The difference only being one of maturity.... Or is there something more?

The body in the manger is a cute scene; and the imagery in our nativity sets is tranquil. But the body on the cross is not pretty. It portrays something gruesome and reminds us of the punishment that our sins deserve.

We do not worship this image. Nor do we have an eye for the grotesque. The image is a tool, to help us remember why we celebrate Christmas, the human birth of God who came to seek and to save sinners. We cannot truly celebrate the birth of this cute little baby if we do not truly celebrate the death of this Man. For His birth in Bethlehem was only to make possible His death outside of Jerusalem, where He willingly gave Himself up as the atoning sacrifice for you, so that you might be re-made in His image, in the image of God, in perfection and righteousness.

So, Come, All Ye Faithful, let us rise together and sing our Exordium Hymn,  
#142 - Rejoice, Rejoice This Happy Morn

**The Feast of the Nativity of our Lord | 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment | St. John 1:1-14 | #348-17**

*We bow our hearts in prayer: We gather round Thee, Jesus dear, So happy in Thy presence here; Grant us, our Savior, ev'ry one, To stand in heav'n before Thy throne. Amen.* <sup>(ELH #144:8)</sup>

We are beginning our Catechism review of the 10 Commandments in this year's sermon texts.

As we consider the Commandments, our Old Man views them as restricting and oppressive.

The Old Man hears the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment and says, "What a selfish, egotistical God!

To think that He should have all MY devotion, trust, and love."

But how egotistical and selfish are we, to think that our devotion, trust, and love are something that a Divine Being needs, as if we were providing something He couldn't get elsewhere, or were dependent on us to provide.

But your New Man sees the Commandments as freeing and providing protection.

The New Man hears the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment and thinks we are free from the burden of having other and false gods, uselessly demanding our time, resources, love, and trust.

And truly, you need no other gods, for the Triune God preserves, redeemed and sanctifies you.

The New Man sees that this one true God is simply protecting your life,

by having your faith, your trust, in the one and only true God,

the one and only Diety that truly exists and is able to save you.

But for us to have such faith, we must know who this God is and what He has done and is still doing for us; and so He gives us a glimpse into His mysterious nature, and the wonder of His gracious works as we look to our Christmas text recorded in the 1 chapter of St. John, reading selected verses.

*We read as follows in Jesus' name:*

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**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 light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**

**... to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.**

**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.** <sup>(ESV)</sup>

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen.* <sup>(John 17:17)</sup>

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Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Darkness is our problem.

Before God ever recorded anything as good in Genesis, first He said, "**let there be light.**"

And immediately, the light overcame the darkness.

That light, God said, was "**good.**" That is: perfect... complete... holy.

Some time later, after God's creation had been completed and finally declared, "**very good,**"

Darkness tried to assert itself.

As Satan, hanging in the tree, overshadowed Eve and the pall of darkness hid the Light of God.

Doubt and envy tempted her heart.

“Who was this God that He should deny me such wisdom as to know good AND evil?”  
“Who was this God that He should command me what to eat or not eat?”

The Devil’s temptation hid God’s divinity from Eve’s eyes.

It hid His justness, His demand for perfection, and His threat of death for disobedience.  
It also hid God’s grace and mercy, all the good that He had given to her in His creation.  
And so when Adam ate the fruit along with Eve,  
their eyes were both “opened,” seeing their shame and their guilt,  
but they could no longer see the goodness of the Lord, only His wrath in justice.  
From then on, their human nature was shrouded in that spiritual darkness,  
and not only them, but all their children, those **who were born... of blood ...**  
**[and]of the will of the flesh ... [and] of the will of man.**

This darkness then, sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, is not just their problem,  
or our problem. It is your problem.

By nature alone, you cannot see God’s light. You cannot know God as He truly is.  
Because of your sin-corrupted flesh, you have a sense of God’s judgment over sin....  
but you, by nature, know nothing of His grace...

So God has revealed Himself in these latter days by His Son, Jesus Christ. <sup>Hebrews1:2</sup>

In simple clear words, He tells us who He is, of His nature.

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.  
He was in the beginning with God.**

What John says in our text in so few words, he doesn’t try to explain.

He simply states the truth of God’s eternal existence,  
existing before the beginning of time, and  
existing as distinct Persons (the **Word** being **with God**),  
yet perfectly united in one divine Substance, or Essence (the **Word** **being God**).

And as suddenly and as simply as God broke into the darkness as His Word was spoken,

**“Let there be light,” in the beginning,**

so suddenly and simply does St. John record the Son of God breaking into our world,

**“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”**

The Word that is eternally **“with God”**, became Immanuel, **“God with us,”** for the rest of eternity.

The **Light of the world**, came shrouded in darkness, first in the womb of Mary,  
then under the darkness of night.

He came into our darkness, into the cruelty of power-hungry men, into our lovelessness –  
your ignorance, your greed and lusts, your lies and betrayals, your debaucheries,  
your envies, your doubts and fears, your devotion to the various idols in your life.

And yet, in this darkness, His light shone.

As Isaiah said, **The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.** <sup>Isaiah 9:2</sup>

Through His preaching and teachings, God’s grace was once again freely pronounced.  
Through His perfection, God’s love was demonstrated, and His Law fulfilled  
and its demands upon you silenced.

Again Darkness tried to assert itself in the Garden of Gethsemane, in the house of the High Priest, in Pilate's and Herod's courts and finally on Golgotha.

For three hours darkness ruled the sky as the one and only true Light hung on the cross.

There your darknesses were all laid on Him as He took God's wrath for their punishment.

And finally, He was laid in the darkness of the tomb.

... **But the darkness could not overcome Him.**

Out of our darkness and death... Jesus, the God-man rose, the bright morning Star.

His light gives life to men. Thereby you have been given **the right to become children of God**, to be **born... of God**; that is **children of light** and not of darkness. <sup>1Thessalonians5:5</sup>

You need not fear the accusations of the devil or even of your own flesh.

Should you put your trust in these accusations, when the eternal Word Himself hanging on the tree in your flesh and blood, has overshadowed you, with His outstretched arms and spoken the eternal Word, "**It is finished**"?

Do not let the devil's pall of darkness, his accusations and lies, hide the Light of God.

For surely, no darkness can overcome the Eternal Word of God.

And that Word, the Son of God, Jesus Christ still comes into our darkness,

no longer to suffer in it, but relieve you of it, through the forgiveness of your sins.

The Eternal Word comes and speaks to you just as powerfully as He made light appear, as declares to you, "Your sins are forgiven."

The Eternal Word made flesh now comes to you, with His body, born of Mary, and His blood poured out for you, for the forgiveness of your sins.

Through Him your darkness is overcome. The Word shines on you and gives you life.

*Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. Amen.*

*Soli Deo Gloria*