

It is significant that he came along after the fall into sin by Adam and Eve.

The serpent's deceitful venom had bitten man.

And now, sin's corruption corrupted everything man is and does.

He was much anticipated. The LORD had promised a child.

To that inexperienced couple, the 9-10 months must have seemed like a life-time.

Eagerly she waited for the birth of her first-born son.

But it wasn't all comfort and joy.

How many first-time mothers can attest to the mixture of joy and fear anticipating the delivery.

The LORD had promised, **"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;**

**in pain you shall bring forth children."** Gen.3:16

Yet the LORD had also said that it would be her offspring —

One would be born from Eve — who would crush the serpent's head, ending his power.

As prophecy is sometimes difficult to interpret because of the corruption of our sinful flesh,

so at his birth she had said, **"I have gotten a man, the LORD."** Gen. 4:1

We can admire her desire for the promise to be fulfilled so quickly

and that she understood the 2 natures of the promised One - That the LORD God would be a man.

But the exact "how" and "when" eluded her.

Her son's father was not the LORD, and so this child would be born,

not **of the image of God**, which was lost in the fall, but of his old man, Adam.

Cain was conceived and born in Adam's **own likeness, after his image** — that is, corrupted in sin.

Sadly, that sin conceived envy, which birthed hatred, maturing into murder. Gen. 5:3

Adam and Eve couldn't have known this was Cain's future.

One might wonder if Adam named his wife correctly — "Eve" that is, "Mother of all living."

But it was fitting, not only because she was the mother of all humanity,

but she is also the mother of all humanity's Savior, Jesus Christ.

That promise of Eve's Offspring just took a few thousand more years to accomplish,

and not to a matron who had been known by a man,

but to a young maid named Mary.

And this time, the Lord would not let this great mystery and promise be clouded by our corruption.

He spelled it out very clearly to Mary, **behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.**

And just for more clarification: **"The Holy Spirit will come upon you,**

**and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;**

**therefore the Child to be born will be called holy — the Son of God.** Luke 1:31-32, 35

With no human father, this Jesus is the image of His Father, **the image of the invisible God,**

**the firstborn of all creation,** Colossians 3:10 **the exact imprint of His nature.** Hebrews 1:3

By His death, the serpent's head was crushed, the devil's power destroyed.

So too, by your rebirth in Baptism, Adam's likeness in you, **the image of the man of dust**, is effaced,

and **the image of the man of heaven**, the image of God 1 Cor. 15:49 is imprinted in its place. ELH #125:4

as you are reborn, **not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.** John 1:13

Rise & Rejoice as we sing our Exordium Hymn:

#142 – Rejoice, Rejoice This Happy Morn

In Jesus' name. Amen.

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*We read as follows in Jesus' name:*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. ... 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. ... The true Light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. ... 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.* (John 17:17)

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Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The first words of God in Scripture are recorded this way, **And God said, "Let there be light."**

Here we have the Word, who **was with God and... was God, in the beginning,**

through Whom **all things were made**, bringing light into the darkness that covered the earth.

This natural enlightenment is but a reflection of Christ's spiritual enlightenment.

For a full Church year now, we have had acolytes serve us, among other ways,  
by lighting the altar candles prior to the services.

During Advent and Christmas, they also light the Advent wreath candles.

And starting on Christmas Eve, they light the Christ candle until Ascension Day.

Lighting candles is not new in the Church.

It was done by the command of God back in the days of the Tabernacle with the golden lamp stand.

There it served a very functional purpose: giving light in that otherwise dark tent.

But it also served as symbolic purpose: foreshadowing Christ.

St. John emphasizes this in chapter 8[:12], Jesus said, **"I AM the Light of the world."**

Before electricity and the invention of the lightbulb, the Church continued to use candles.

Again, for the functional purpose of lighting up the chancel so that pastors could read (candelabras),  
as well as for an opportunity to teach truths about our Savior,

no longer foreshadowing Christ, but now as a reflection of Him (the two white altar candles).

But now we have electricity and lightbulbs.

Normally, our chancel is so lit up with theater-style lighting that the light of candles  
is only noticeable at the flame itself... but still it serves to teach.

We use only 2 altar candles, representing the two natures of Christ, His human and divine natures.

In churches that still make use of candelabras each week, this is emphasized by the tradition that  
the 2 altar candles are lit only when the Holy Communion is celebrated to teach the real presence  
of these 2 natures on the altar when Christ's divine body and blood are administered to His people.

(Since we at Parkland don't regularly use candelabras, we always light the altar candles,

which still holds its symbolism since Jesus is always present in both natures in His Word.)...

In our Western Church tradition, received from the northern climes of western Europe, normally, the altar candles are lit from liturgical south (the right) to liturgical north (the left). This is a nod to Isaiah 9:2 where we read,

**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.**

The natural darkness of the shorter days and longer nights in the northern reaches of Europe fittingly reflected the spiritual darkness of the barbarian Germanic and Scandinavian tribes. And so the light of the Gospel starts from the “southern” candle and reaches up to the “northern.”

...

The Advent wreath is a late comer to the traditions of the Church, being only a century and a half old. And, in fact, became popular first in the home, at family altars during family devotions, and only later came into use in the Church.

(What a wonderful example of how our home worship and the Divine Service compliment each other, as the Divine Service fosters home devotion and the home devotion feeds into the Divine Service!)

As the nights get longer through Advent, each week another candle is lit so that the light grows brighter, building up to Christmas, when it is dark the longest outside.

Within the Advent wreath, sits the long-standing tradition of the Christ candle; first lit each new Church year on Christmas Eve.

We keep it lit through the Divine Services as a symbol of Christ's light shining while we celebrate His life lived for us in this world.

It stays lit through His Epiphany, as the Magi follow the star.

As Jesus' light shines in the temple, at the wedding in Cana, and on the Mt. of Transfiguration.

It shines through PreLent, as the heavens open up on Jesus at His baptism,

It shines through Lent as the Holy Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted for us, as He manifests His authority over the devil ... and over the demons, casting them out, as He feeds 5,000 men (+ women and children) in the wilderness.

The Christ candle continues to shine in our Divine Services as Jesus willingly enters Jerusalem as the appointed Lamb of God on Palm Sunday,

and on Maundy Thursday institutes the Holy Communion, leaving us His will and testament that we eat His divine Body in the bread & drink His blood in the cup for the remission of our sins.

But then... the light goes out on the darkest day

—not the kind of day we just experienced a few days ago, with the least hours of sunlight, but the day when the full weight of our sins and the wrath of God was all concentrated on the divine man, Jesus Christ, who hung suspended between heaven and earth on Good Friday.

On this day, as the Word whose **life is the light of men** was snuffed out, so is the Christ candle...

To the world it looked as if the darkness of death had overcome the Light.

It looked as if our sins were too much for Jesus to bear.

It looked as if the devil's venomous bite at the heel had completely crushed Eve's Offspring.

But on Easter the Christ candle is lit once more as we celebrate the true Light, rising once again to enlighten everyone, as He comes back into the world.

And we proclaim, *Jesus Christ is the Light of the world, the Light no darkness can overcome.*

And so the Christ candle shines on through the darkness of Thomas' doubt and thru the rest of Easter,

until we get to the Ascension of our Lord to the Father's heavenly throne at right hand of power.

So today, as we celebrate the Light coming into the world as a divine infant to enlighten our darkness, the altar candles shine to teach us of the 2 natures of Christ.

They serve as teachers of His enlightenment that overcomes the darkness of our doubts and fears, and light the way for us as we travel through this shadow of death, showing us where our incarnate Savior is to be found *for us men and for our salvation*.

As the candles are lit prior to each service, it's a reminder that Jesus isn't far off, but present with you, dwelling among you:

in His Word and preaching, in the proclamation of the forgiveness of your sins, in the bread and wine with His divine Body and Blood.

Though you may not see Him, He makes His face to shine upon you and give you peace, each and every service.

Glory be to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men. **Amen**

*Soli Deo Gloria*