

## In Nomine Iesu

### Christmas Day, the Nativity of our Lord Nothing can ruin Christmas, nothing! - John 1:1-14

“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 nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe on His name; 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 beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

### *Exortium*

The world is falling apart. There are wars in more places than Ukraine and Israel. Our own borders are not secure, and there seems to be no end of the chaos in sight. Home prices are high, mortgage rates too. If you are renting, there is no relief there. And a blue tarp is no answer. Inflation has done no good to our family budget. Crime is an ever-present menace. Civility and neighborliness, once strengths of our country, seem to have almost disappeared. The mood of the country is gloomy. For many, friends and family members have died this year. And sickness, serious sickness, afflicts so many. Trouble and sadness have probably touched your family this past year. It may seem to you that Christmas doesn't shine as brightly as in the past.

But it does! The birth of Christ shines more brightly in dark, troubled times. For it brings Life, and that Life is the Light of men. It shines forth from the One who was given to all and to each, given from heaven where sadness is no more, and joy and peace are unending. He was given in dark, troubled times to bring heaven's joy and peace to you and so lift your heart to heaven, where you, He promises, will dwell forever with Him.

So, let us rise and sing, shout and proclaim: Nothing can ruin Christmas. Nothing!

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the eternal Word made man this day. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

+++

When you read John's Gospel there is no Christmas story, no angels, no shepherds, no swaddling cloths, no manger. John left that to Luke. There is no star in the east, no wise men, no gold, frankincense or myrrh, no flight to Egypt. John left that to Matthew. John simply shows us who know Christ that **Nothing can ruin Christmas, nothing!**

I

Matthew anchors the Christmas story deep in the soil of the Promised Land, Israel. He paints a picture of Jesus as the seed of Abraham and the son of David, a carpenter's son from Nazareth who was declared by John the Baptist to be the very Messiah, the lawful successor to David's throne, a Hebrew/Israelite/Jew (for the terms are not synonymous) who saves the world by His suffering and dying, and then rising again from death.

Luke anchors the Christmas story in the history not just of Israel, but of the world. Luke pictures Jesus not so much as the seed of Abraham, the son of David, but the son of Adam the first man. Jesus was born in Bethlehem when Caesar Augustus was emperor, Quirinius governing Syria, and the whole Roman world undergoing a tax census. Luke doesn't accent the Jewishness of Jesus, but His all-encompassing humanity. Jesus is the second Adam, the new head of humanity, who embraces all with His life, death, and resurrection. He is the One who draws close to tax collectors and sinners, women, lepers, Samaritans, and even Gentiles, in other words, to those the religious of His day had no use or respect for.

John speaks to his audience as those who already know the important details of the birth of Jesus. But if you don't know those details, you must consult Matthew and Luke. He also assumes that you know what Jesus did in the course of His ministry, and what He said. Again, if you don't, you must consult Matthew and Luke, or if you're in a hurry, the Reader's Digest version that is Mark. But simply knowing what Jesus did and said does not tell you all that you need to know about Jesus, about who He is, and was, and will be, forever. That's John's burden. He knew that one could recite all the facts about Jesus and still not understand who He is. That's why John has no nativity, no baptism by John, no parables, no institution of the Lord's Supper. He tells us about only seven selected miracles. But John does have all those "I am" sayings of Jesus, including the stunning, "Before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:59) For they tell us who Jesus is.

When John put pen to paper, it almost sounds as though he were trying to rewrite the Bible starting with Genesis. He was rewriting the Torah of Moses in terms of Jesus. In fact, John employed many images of Moses and pressed them into use. From them he took the idea that the Torah was the divine Word, that it was in the beginning with God. John borrowed from the Greeks of his day who said that the "Logos," or divine spark, was the light and life of all people. John bundled these two together, Torah and Logos, and wrapped them up in the flesh and blood of Jesus with this theologically loaded passage: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." With that one sentence, John closes the distance between Jew and Greek. The eternal Word, the Torah of the Jews, the Logos of the Greeks, the ordering Principle of the universe, the Second Person of the Undivided Trinity, became flesh, born of a human mother, and dwelt among us in the fullness of God's glory.

And it's not as though He hadn't been with us before He dwelt among us. John is quite clear on that point too. Jesus is the eternal Word, who was with God in the beginning, and is Himself God. Through Him all things were made. He is the Light of the world, the first Word spoken to the darkness of creation on day one. In Him is life. All living things have their life in Him. He is the Word that called forth all plants from the ground, put fish in the sea, birds in the air, critters on the ground. He made man from the earth and breathed life into him. There is nothing in all creation that doesn't owe its existence to the Word - not you, not me. And so there never was a time when the Word wasn't in us and over us. But now, John says, He is with us.

And so, the Word who has been over the creation since the creation, the Light and Life of all, who appeared in various times and manners to the fathers of the Old Testament, now in these last days, as the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it, has taken up residence in the tent of our humanity to dwell among us as one of us. That is what John is saying.

## II

Let your mind dwell on that for a moment. John is saying that the baby Luke told us

about, the One lying in a manger, drooling, soiling his diapers, nursing at his mother's breast, burping, doing all the terribly human stuff babies do, is 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 are made. That is what John is saying.

The eternal Word has fingers and toes, a nose and eyes. He is just like us, but without the interference of sin, without our inborn blindness to the light of eternity, without our deafness to God's plain, clear will, without our self-centeredness. He's like us, as God intended for us to be. He is our humanity re-created in God's image. In Him is life, our life. We are re-conceived in Him. We are re-born in Him. Humanity itself is re-born in Christ, the second Adam. You see, we're not simply celebrating the birth of Jesus at Christmas. We are celebrating the re-birth of humanity itself in Jesus of Nazareth.

Mary could barely hold this in her heart as she pondered. The shepherds were amazed. Theologians through the centuries have struggled with it, councils have argued over it, churches have fought and divided over it. Even you yourself may be filled with doubt. How can this be? How can God be man and not cease to be God? How can man be God and not cease to be man? How can the infinite Word become flesh? How can all the fullness of God dwell bodily in Jesus?

But John reminds us that you don't have to understand a person in order to relate to him. I don't always understand my wife, and she certainly doesn't always understand me. You don't need to explain how the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us, any more than you need to explain how water can be a baptism of the Holy Spirit or bread and wine can be the body and blood of Christ. You need only take the Word at His word and enjoy His company. The darkness need not understand the light to receive it. It only needs to be darkness. Darkness cannot keep out the light or overcome it. Light will always fill the emptiness of the darkness, as it did on day one of the creation.

The dead don't need to understand life to receive it; they need only be dead. Life always fills the emptiness of death. We who sit in the darkness, in the shadow of death, need only trust that the Light that gives light to all shines on us in Jesus Christ. Our unbelief doesn't keep Jesus from being Light, Life, and Salvation. He is that whether we believe it or not, just as He is the Word that created us and holds all things together, whether we believe it or not. Our unbelief can only get in the way of our enjoying His Light and Life, recognizing it, and resting in it.

The One who holds the universe together has shown us His face, told us His Name. The One whom the physicists seek and mathematicians calculate, the One whom the mystics ponder, the First Mover of the universe, the Light that lightens all people, the Life that gives life to all - you know who He is. John tells you. You may not understand Him, but you know who He is. He is Jesus. He is Mary's Son. He is God's Son in the flesh.

That's why angels sing, shepherds worship, and Mary ponders, even though she knows the facts about her Son better than anyone. And there is so much here to ponder, even for those of us who know the facts. God and man are reconciled, brought together in the eternal Son. God dwells with man, pitches His tent in our humanity. As the carol says, "Veiled in flesh, the God-head seen / Hail! Incarnate Deity / Pleased as man with men to dwell. Jesus, our Emmanuel."

+++

The Word became flesh. How wonderful it is to be human today! How honored we are that the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us! His birth and life, His

suffering and death, His burial and resurrection, His ascension to the right hand of the Father in our flesh and blood. Our Savior, our Brother, the Second Adam, stands once more in the presence of God interceding for us. So, you see, dear friends, **nothing can ruin Christmas, nothing.** Nothing can change what God has done. As Martin Luther once sang: “What harm can sin and death then do? / The true God now abides with you. / Let hell and Satan rage and chafe, / Christ is your Brother - ye are safe.” And so, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” Merry Christmas to one and all. Amen.

**Soli Deo Gloria**