

December 25, 2018 John 1:1-18

Where does the Christmas story begin? The angels' announcement to the shepherds? Gabriel's visit to Mary? Or the prophecies of the Messiah going all the way back to the curse upon the serpent in the Garden of Eden? Well, the Holy Spirit directed the Evangelist John to begin the Christmas Story at the very beginning—even before the world was made. “In the beginning...” sounds like Genesis is being written all over again. Christians have to struggle and fight over these very words of Scripture, and their human minds' reasoning ability is stretched beyond what it can bear. But the truth has to be confessed, and indeed it was: Jesus the Son of God was the Word who was with God, through Whom everything was made in heaven and earth, and the Word was God from eternity.

His coming in human flesh to this world, John tells us, was a coming to His own, a coming to those who He created, a coming to share His glory as the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. All of creation belonged to Jesus, even before there was a Bethlehem or a Mary or a Joseph. As Christ Himself told His enemies, “Before Abraham was, I AM!” (John 8:58) which means He eternally existed as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Son, who is worthy to be worshiped as God—who is truly God. Yet as the only-begotten Son, He came to reclaim that which was rightfully his—for mankind was created in His image to be born as children of God. Paul wrote in Galatians that we are even called “sons of God” whether we are Jew or Gentile, male or female, due to our life united by faith in Christ.

While we are not told exactly how things would have been had not Adam and Eve fell into sin, God's Word does tell us this much, that God had it in mind from all eternity, before creation, to make you His children. It is suggested by several church fathers, and I don't think they're too far off on this, that the Lord had it in mind to come among us to be with us as our Immanuel, no matter what, sin or no sin. But what really matters in this train of thought, is that as great a rebellion as sin is, as great of a destruction as it is--- there was God's perfect creation and His relationship to it. And all that mess was not going to get in the way of our Lord's original, perfect plan to make you His children. Even at the cost of His own life.

And our Creator determined to ransom us from our terrorist captor, the prince of darkness. This ransom could only happen if He took on our human flesh--because it is flesh and blood which is subject to the sentence of death. So the eternal Word, now appears in flesh, and all the world rejoices at the one and only Christmas gift that was promised before time began.

To be sure, the birth of the Baby Jesus is not the first time the Son of God broke into creation. After He spoke into the darkness and void, bringing forth light, then heaven and earth, then everything filling them, then finally man in His own image, He promised His coming as the Seed of the Woman to crush the serpent's head. The Word before He was flesh appeared several times, and sometimes the Bible names Him “the angel of the Lord.” --“The messenger of the LORD” --or we might say “the Lord himself brings

the message.” He made a covenant with Abraham, even performing a portion of the ceremony walking between the sacrificed animals in the form of a cloud of smoke and flaming torch. (Gen. 15) He pushed back the Red Sea so that Moses and about 2 million of his closest relatives walked on the dry sea floor between two walls of water. The Pre-incarnate Christ fought the battle of Jericho for Joshua, talked to Samson's parents, called out young Samuel's name, consecrated the Temple building, saved Hezekiah and his people from the Assyrians by killing over 180,000 of them in one night, torched Elijah's dripping wet altar, walked around in a furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, wrote with His own handwriting on the wall, and revealed visions to Daniel and Ezekiel, just to name a few instances.

But as stunning and dramatic as these appearances were in the Old Testament, they all point their finger, John the Baptist style, to the greatest coming—the Christ Child. This is the turning point in the world's history. This is the incarnation that was foretold from the beginning. This may not be the beginning of the Christmas story, but it certainly is the highest point. And whether the church celebrates it today, or on Epiphany like it used to centuries ago, or on Ascension Day—which is most probably very close to the actual day of our Lord's birth—the event it commemorates is the same: the Word was born of Mary and laid in a manger in Bethlehem.

Take note in this apparently simple detail from John's Christmas Gospel, and you'll have to make a special effort because it can sound so familiar that we mistakenly tune it out.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory. There is more in there than I can tell you today or in all of our lifetimes put together. To become flesh does not only mean that Jesus the Son of God put on skin, but it also means that the sinless Victim of His own free will zipped Himself up in a straight jacket with a big, red target painted on it. That target of the Almighty God's eternal wrath was not merely flesh, but sinful flesh, namely mankind's rebellion. There have been many illusionists like Harry Houdini, who have made some impossible escapes from death; Jesus launched Himself right at the start into the most impossible death that anyone could ever imagine. When the Word was made flesh, He was right then and there made the Scapegoat to end all scapegoats. He would be the sponge, if you will, to soak up all your sinfulness and suffer ultimate death for it as though He were the only Sinner who ever was. He needed to be true God in order to make the sinless sacrifice and for it to count for all,—but He needed to be true Man in human flesh in order to make that sacrifice and suffer and die for your sake.

No matter what your sin and shortcoming, the Word was made flesh to pay for it. Whatever sorrow or hurt that you feel to this day, your Jesus bears it with the cross on His shoulder. Though the fear of death and the power of the devil leave you powerless on your own, the true Light of Christ has overcome the darkness and will never be quenched. You have added sin upon sin, even when you know you knew better. But the Son of God broke into our world so that He could multiply grace upon grace as His eternal Christmas gift to you. After declaring you fully forgiven and righteous in the sight of the Father, you as a reborn child are united in the flesh with Christ the Word so that

He lives in you by the Holy Spirit.

This is no mere psychological game that I'm using to change your behavior. As the Lord dwelt long ago in the Temple, so now He cleanses you and dwells within you, and fights for you so that your sinful flesh doesn't use grace as an excuse to sin, but your new nature rises up with Christ and you are free to give His grace to your neighbor. Your baptism promises that every day, and the Lord's Supper of Jesus' Body and Blood really does it.

One of the times when Elijah met Jesus way before the time He was born in Bethlehem, this prophet was told to get high up on a mountain top and prepare for the Lord to pass by. A mighty wind, a massive earthquake, and a devastating fire passed by first, but the Lord was not in any of those fantastic forces of nature. Then there came a still, small voice that spoke strength, courage and assurance to the distressed servant of the Lord.

Well, as Christmas is now here, what have we seen in the virtual whirlwind of the last few weeks? First there was the cooking, cleaning, baking and buying, but the Lord was not in those things. Then there was the big man with the red cap and the reindeer, and as nice as he is, the Lord was not in that either. There was at last wholesome feelings and gestures of love and hope and goodwill, but the Lord was not in those, at least not quite yet. Where the Lord is found at Christmas, and where He gives the proper perspective to all that we know, and love and endure in the holiday, He is found in the still, small voice from the Gospel of John: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We (you and I) have seen His glory, for by His grace upon grace you are forgiven all your sins. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Rejoice this Christmas, O children born of God—The SAVIOR IS BORN! Amen