

John 1:1-14
Christmas Morn
December 25, 2025

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

If the only true *meaning* of Christmas is “Christ in the flesh,” then, you might say, the only true *gift* of Christmas is Christ in the flesh. That’s not to say that you are somehow sinning to enjoy gifts under the tree, gift-giving to one another; can we not thank God and each other for them, can we not enjoy them, as they are signs of the love and affection and care we have for one another... our desire to express in gift-form the fervent love toward one another we Christians are to share (and, sometimes, perhaps take for granted) in daily life? By all means, enjoy that gift-giving tradition, especially in light of the fact that you all share together the *true* gift that is Christ in the flesh.

But, if we are to understand *all of that* connection rightly, we need to understand ‘the gift that is the incarnate Christ’ rightly. For we rejoice that He once became flesh and entered human history, but we fail to understand the *gift-giving* aspect of that if we see his purposes or hear this good news as merely being ‘in history.’

This is the tragic and sad, but breathtaking emptiness of American Christianity; so many false teachings that wrap themselves

in the swaddled Christ-Child fail their hearers when they point only to the Christ swaddled in cloths but refuse to point to the Christ swaddled in bread and wine. And, not to be outdone, how sad is the false-teaching that Christ gives us his flesh and blood, not as the divine gift-giving of *benefits* (not as the means of *grace*), but as the means of *law*, to offer up our own efforts – the Sacrifice of the Mass – to earn God’s favor. No, who among you will give a gift today (or gave a gift last night) that says, “Here is your gift; it is a list of things to do weekly, and if you do it, you will make me happy.” That’s no gift-giving; that’s law-giving! And again, who among you will have someone open a box that ends up being empty and say, “But by this empty box, you can *remember* that I once gave you a gift!” And if you think such would be the most humbug thing to do to your loved ones this Christmas, why would churches teach it *of Christ Himself* when He says, “Take eat; take drink... this is my body and blood, for you.”

No, against both errors, God fully expresses his love for you by planning and enacting a Gospel wherein the Christ, having once entered flesh and blood in human history, did so to offer Himself up to God once for all in the same flesh and blood, and *now* to continually *gift-give* to you that same flesh and blood, and thereby sustain the faithful throughout your sojourn in human history.

There is simply no better day to teach on the Sacrament of the Altar than on Christmas Morning, for the Sacrament is no

afterthought of the Gospel, but it is the fullest expression and gift of it. (Of course, one could say the same of teaching on the Sacrament of the Altar on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday... but that sort of makes the point: *everything* Christ entered into human history to accomplish, He gathers his Church on earth to receive.) He did not just die to *pay* for our sins, but also lives to faithfully *give* us the forgiveness. He did not just die to *accomplish* the justification, but lives to *grant* us the clear conscience that we are indeed justified. He did not just *purchase* the gift, only to tell the excited children, “It will get here eventually;” rather, He purchased the gift and *sets* it at (if you will) the foot of the tree of life by placing it upon every altar (in fact, that visual at the front of our sanctuary is particularly illustrative... the foot of the cross visually touching the top of the altar) ... because there He places the procured gift upon every altar to which the eager children gather at the first word of His coming: “If Christ is coming today,” they say, “I want to be here to *greet* him... more than that, *receive* him and *cling* to him... more than that, *be forgiven and strengthened* by his visit.”

This is not merely the *Church’s* joy in the Sacrament, but *God’s*... for He is the One who designed it and taught it throughout even all of Old Testament history. And he taught it using quite incarnate, even quite graphic, foreshadowing – the slaughtering and blood-letting and sacrificing and burning and eating the flesh of the lambs, from generation to generation of those whom He had

delivered out of bondage and slavery. How could such graphically, tangible and incarnational foreshadowing of the payment of sins and the merciful sharing of that forgiveness... how could that somehow be fulfilled by something *less* tangible, *less* incarnate, merely memorial, a mere remembrance, a mere spiritual, heart-filled, participation? If such was the case, then we would need no fleshly Christ born of woman; we would simply need a spirit-child dreamed up by man.

But, no: Christ was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary... and he became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. And, that body was *full* of grace and truth because, as the epistle to the Hebrews says, “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature.” Consider that: forever joined to that humanity, even in the frame of the newborn child... forever joined to that human nature is the exact nature of the Deity. What **wonder!** – to be able, with the shepherds and Mary and Joseph, to lay eyes upon the God-man.

But, of what **benefit**, if he was only to die as the Lamb upon the altar of sacrifice but not be eaten as the product of that altar? Is that not everything the Lord taught for 1300 years from the Exodus onward? Did He not teach His people that the flesh of the sacrifice was to be eaten by the priests who lived at, and depended on dwelling with God at, His altar? And did He not equally teach them

never, ever to drink the blood of the sacrifice because “the life of the [sacrifice] is in its blood”!

But, “in Him (in Christ) was life”... and thus, “Take drink, this is my blood.” To paraphrase Hermann Sasse, whose *We Confess Anthology* some of you have been reading with me, these words of Christ (“Take drink, this is my blood”) set *Jesus’* meal apart from any other religious memorial meal that any other religion would come up with; for any other religion’s memorial would refuse to speak so specifically of the tangible blood, even if it might speak of ‘partaking of their god’s presence.’ But to speak specifically of the blood as a distinct ingredient different than the body cannot be taken symbolically, but only literally and truly... just as God very truly said of the animals of the Old Covenant, “The *life* is in the blood of the animal.” So, His gift to you is his very life – “In Him was life” – the body and blood of his incarnation, which makes it not only the very body of true man, but also the very body of the holy God... and thus, “take eat, the *true* body, the *holy* body of Jesus Christ”... Yes, his *true, holy* body is his gift to you... his *true, holy* blood is his gift to you... that He might sustain you in the incarnate life of the adoption of sons. And, by sustaining you in the adoption of sons, he is sustaining you in adoption into his *light*, the light of men – “In Him was life, and that life was the light of men”, or “I am the light of the world,” he declares of himself. Or, again, Simeon sings, “A light to lighten the gentiles.” Or, as the prophet Isaiah says it, “Darkness shall

cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples. But the LORD will arise upon you, and His glory will be seen upon you.”

And, if Christ not only shines light upon men (as if from a distance), but *is himself* the light of man, the very radiance of the glory of God, and thus divine light for those dwelling in deep darkness, then for the Christian who was born *into* that light that *is* Christ... for that Christian to be tempted to live daily life without him – without feasting upon Him who is not just light, but life... whose very life *is* the light that lightens our darkness – for that Christian to live without feasting upon Him is to live daily life in an increasing famine from *His* flesh-and-blood sustenance. And, without *Christ’s* life, ours becomes an ever-increasing, ever-enclosing darkness... and, where once we had been born anew into His light, we starve ourselves and would die anew into darkness... not the darkness of simply ‘no spiritual enlightenment’ ... but the true darkness of death, the body starved of life now growing dimly weak as a dying flame and, soon... nothing remains but the ashen cold of death.

But God would not have the sinner die, and so he bids his baptized, His beloved adopted, to eat and drink and be strengthened by his life, which is to then burn brightly with his light... so that, as we are forgiven and strengthened by *Him*, *He* may say of *us*, “You are the light of the world; let your light shine before men.” Which is the same as us saying, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”... for, He said, “This is my body, this is my blood, given and shed for

you”... and the light that came into the world as a Child in a manger now sustains your confession as light for the world and unto life everlasting.

Now, maybe a small part of you wants to say, “This is all great, Pastor, but can’t we just hear a typical Christmas sermon – that Jesus was born and laid in the manger and that the shepherds worshiped and all the angels rejoiced.”

Answer: God did not plan for the manger to stand *alone* or stand *forever*. Nor did He plan that even for the cross, but – to borrow from and paraphrase Luther – ‘If I want the forgiveness of sins, I do not run to the manger, for Christ is no longer there; nor to the cross, for He is not there either. Nor even to the empty tomb. Rather, I go to the Word and Sacrament, because there is where Christ has *planned* to be and is *still there* for me.’

In other words, just as we said in Advent and in our study of Galatians that Baptism is the express fulfillment of Christ’s *first* coming while it ushers us toward the resurrection as the express fulfillment of Christ’s *second* coming, so also we can rightly say: the baptismal life is divinely fed by participation in *the Holy Supper* just as the resurrected life will be divinely fed in the Lamb’s marriage feast – the same Supper, but then experienced by the body and to sight in full – the resurrected life will be divinely fed in His kingdom that will never end.

So then, just as the purpose of Christ's birth, death, resurrection, and ascension is that you are baptized into the adoption of sons, so also – that you may be *sustained* in the adoption of sons – the Holy Supper and Christ being swaddled in bread and wine and laid upon the altar is the sacramental fulfillment of Christ being swaddled in cloths and laid in the manger.

Thus, if you would desire to have run to the manger on that first Christmas, how much more joy is yours to run to the altar this Christmas... and *every* Lord's Day (the true *weekly* festival!), for the great gift-giving is not confined to one day in history, or even one festival of each calendar year... but the Lord has *become* flesh and blood that he may *share* with us his flesh and blood as our true weekly rest – “Come unto Me,” (you could imagine the Christ-child beckoning from the manger with outstretched arms, but, instead – with outstretched nail-pierced hands) – “Come unto Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” says our incarnate God, and proves Himself our true and holy Sabbath.

So then, each Lord's Day, His gift-giving of Himself continues, so that each Lord's Day is Christmas, and this festive joy you know today, this festive joy of His people lasts forever. And it lasts forever, not as some spiritual sentimentality (or even *seasonal* sentimentality), nor by some ritual practice of earthly gift-giving, nor by some ordinance of remembrance... it lasts forever because His plan for His gospel was *always* to remain with us in *human* nature,

that (glorified and in communication with his *divine* nature) his human nature could also grace each altar, and the whole Church could feast on the God-man that is its Lamb and, by feasting on Him, may partake of Him in whom is life, and that life is the light of men.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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