

The Vigil of the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord
St. John 1:1-14
December 24th, 2022
Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

The Light Shineth in the Darkness

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sermon Text:

In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

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

My beloved children, you may have noticed that the Gospel reading for this Vigil of the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord is not the reading to which we may be accustomed on this Eve of the Feast. Ordinarily we have the Gospel reading from the Evangelist St. Luke, the Second chapter, relating the incarnation of the Christ Child. That the Apostle and Evangelist St. John's Gospel is used on this night is not a mistake, or a typo. This is actually the correct historic Gospel for the Vigil of the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord. Why and how these two Gospels were switched is a discussion for another time. However, that the proper order of these two Gospel accounts has been restored is for our benefit. For the other Gospel accounts in St. Matthew and St. Luke begin with the Incarnation of the Christ Child; they begin with the birth of God as man—His earthly birth.

The Apostle and Evangelist St. John, however, gets to the meat and heart of the matter. He does not draw us away into the images that pervade this holy day with cute scenes of sheep and a baby. St. John takes us directly to our Lord's eternal generation. He skips over the Lord's conception, His birth, His growth, His education, and takes us into the eternal realms. The Lord + Jesus, this Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes that we will hear about tomorrow morning in the Gospel from the Evangelist St. Luke, is eternal. He was in the beginning with the Word. The Word was both with God, and the Word was God. This fact must be established in our minds before we ever see the Baby + Jesus lying in a manger.

For if He is not the eternal Lord God; if He is not the Second Person of the Holy Trinity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, then His birth can really be considered no different from any other birth. That this fact is glossed over by the majority of the world explains to us why so many people, and churches, focus on the birthday of the Lord + Jesus. For them this day is just another birthday celebration. They sing "Happy Birthday" and have a cake and blow out candles as if the Lord + Jesus is just another person getting another year older. Such nonsensical celebrations diminish the incarnation of our Lord + Jesus into just another birth with no real significant meaning; nothing other than another Jewish baby has been born. The only significance one can draw from such birthday

celebrations was that the Baby + Jesus was born under less-than-ideal conditions.

The Apostle and Evangelist St. John, who was the beloved Apostle of the Lord + Jesus, who reclined upon His breast at the institution of the Lord's Supper, who became the caretaker of the Lord's mother, the Virgin Mary, who knew the Lord + Jesus as a man thoroughly for three years, rescues us from viewing this birth as just another Baby being born. He who knew the Lord as a man for three years and cared for His mother after His death and resurrection, shows us that birthday celebrations for the Baby + Jesus which treat Him as just another baby born are inappropriate. For St. John shows us that this particular Baby is eternal. He from the beginning, begotten of His heavenly Father before all worlds. He is God of God, and Light of Light. He is Very God of Very God. He is Begotten, not made. He is of one substance with the Father. By Him all things were made. There is not anything in this world that exists that was not made by Him.

This fact must be firmly entrenched in our minds before we even begin to examine the Lord's birth as a man. We must know and understand—we must believe wholeheartedly—that the Lord + Jesus is the eternal Lord God, Who has existed from before the foundation of the world. He is the Almighty Lord God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth. For if He is not the Lord God of all the world, His birth means absolutely nothing to us. If He is just another Baby born on this day; if He is just another man—even if He is considered a very special man—His birth does us no good.

For there can be no salvation found in Him if He is just another man. Even if He fulfilled the Law perfectly as just a man, that perfection would only count for Him, and not for any of the rest of us. His perfect fulfilling of the Law would only be good for Him, and not for all of mankind. The same is true of His sacrifice: His sacrifice on the tree of the holy cross would avail us nothing if He was just a man.

Therefore, tonight the Apostle and Evangelist confirms into our ears that this Baby born in Bethlehem of Judea to a Virgin Mother is no ordinary Baby Boy. He is the Lord God Almighty Who created the Heavens and the Earth, Who was in the beginning with the Father and the Holy Ghost. He is Lord and God of all things. This Lord God—our Lord God—comes down from Heaven to one thing for us, His creation. He comes to bring us life. Life with Him and the angels and saints of Heaven. Life eternal free from sin, death, and the power of the devil. For in Him was life. He was the Creator of all life. He was the Creator of our lives. He gave us life.

But through our first parents, and through our own sinful actions, we chose death over life. Life was exchanged by us for death and darkness. This is why we celebrate this night in darkness with only the light of candles as a reminder that we live in darkness. That sin has so pervaded us and this world that we are surrounded by death and darkness. But these lit candles that we hold are our reminder that in the Lord + Jesus was life. In this Baby + Jesus, Who is the eternal Lord God Who was begotten of the heavenly Father before all worlds, is life, and this life is the light of men. The light shineth in the darkness. The Light of the World, our Lord + Jesus, shineth in the darkness of this world, and dispels the powers of night. He brings light and life to this dark world filled with death. Our lit candles are our reminder that this light not only shines in the world, but shines among us.

The Light of the World shineth in the darkness of this world and among us. But sadly, the world did not apprehend it. The world did not apprehend Him when He first came in the flesh born of the Virgin Mary. They crucified Him on the tree of the holy cross. Much of the world did not apprehend Him after His resurrection and ascension, when the Apostles were sent out into all the world to proclaim the good news of salvation found in the Lord + Jesus alone. The world persecuted the Apostles, and killed them for their eyewitness account of the death and resurrection of the Lord + Jesus, for this world did not want to hear it; they did not want a Savior. The same is true today. This world still does not apprehend the Lord + Jesus; they do not apprehend that the Lord God has taken upon Himself our flesh—has become a part of His creation—in order that He might redeem this world from their sins. If

they do not outright reject Him, they reject Him by diminishing His birth to just another birthday party; another Jewish Boy gaining another year of age.

They dress up the Lord God's birth in the flesh with a whole host of activities that in the long run do not matter at all. Christmas decorations, and food and beverage and desserts, and gifts, Christmas carols being sung, and family gatherings do not matter at all if we do not take time to apprehend our Lord + Jesus. We apprehend our Lord + Jesus by recognizing that this birth is not just another birth like any other person born. This birth is the eternal Lord God taking up residence in our flesh. He comes to dwell with us His creation. Moreover, we apprehend our Lord + Jesus, the life of the world which brings this world out of the dark prison of sin and death, by clinging to Him in faith for our salvation.

Therefore, my dearly beloved children, let us apprehend our Lord + Jesus with the faith that trusts that He is both God and man, and that He has come into this world to redeem us from sin, death and the power of the devil. Let us hold our candles high and rejoice that into this dark world, our Lord has come to bring us the light of salvation. These candles represent the light of the Christ among us. That He dwells among us with the light and life-giving gifts found in the means of grace, which produces the fruit of faith in us, and causes us to cling to the Lord + Jesus as not just a Baby wrapped up in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, but we cling to Him in faith that this Baby is indeed the Lord God Almighty Who was with the Lord God heavenly Father from before the foundation of the world, and that He is also the Lord God, Who is born in our flesh from the Blessed Virgin Mary to be our Lord. In Him is life, and the life is the light of the world. Thanks be to God! In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!