

OF THE FATHER'S LOVE BEGOTTEN
John 1:1-18; Christmas Day; December 25, 2020

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 was not any thing made that was made. 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... To all who did receive [the true Light], who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were begotten, 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 have seen His glory, glory as of the only-begotten Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (1:1-5, 12-14)

We could spend the rest of our lives contemplating the Christmas Gospel from John one and we would not have more than dipped our toe into its depths. “Of the Father’s love begotten Ere the worlds began to be” (*LSB* 384.1). The Word of God through St. John transports us from this time and place to before time began, to the eternal begetting of the Son by God the Father, to the creation of all things by the spoken Word, especially of the creation of light by the One who is “God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man” (Nicene Creed). **The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.** We confess this mystery and sing of it in any number of Christmas carols, but, this side of heaven, we will never get much beyond **pondering it in our hearts** like the virgin Mary did that first Christmas night.

But it is not St. John’s intention to wow us with theological brilliance beyond comprehension and send us home with our heads spinning. No, he invites us to come into the Light that is Christ Himself, the Light who scatters the darkness around us, the shadow of sin and darkness of death that seek to ensnare us. In Jesus there is no darkness at all, only Light that the darkness has not overcome, and in His Light we have the life that does not end. John invites to believe in the only-begotten Son from the Father and live as the children of God.

Christmas is about the love of God the Father, the love He expressed in the begetting of His Son in eternity, the Son whom He sent into this world in the flesh of man for the salvation of mankind and all creation. **And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only-begotten Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.** In simple terms, this means that God joined Himself to our earthly family by His Son being born the baby boy Jesus of the virgin Mary. God became man; **the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.** It is not so difficult to understand that Christmas is the celebration that God in Christ Jesus joined us forever in the human family. How this can be remains beyond our fallen human understanding. It is a mystery, along with the mystery of the Holy Trinity, how God is one God, yet has three persons. With great awe the Apostle Paul wrote of the incarnation: **Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion; He [the Son of God] was manifested in the flesh** (1 Tim. 3:16).

Yet, there is no mystery about why God became flesh in Jesus Christ. It was to show us God's glory. What is the **glory as of the only-begotten Son from the Father, full of grace and truth?** That God's Son would be exalted/lifted high on the cross to suffer and die for sinners, and then rise from the dead to live forever. God's Son came to do what only a human being can do, but do it in a way that only the perfect Son of God could do it: die on the cross in our place to pay for our sins. God's Son left the glory of heaven to show God's glory in dying for sinners. In this we see the great love that God has for us; it appears to be a greater love for us than for His only Son.

One of the most profound Old Testament accounts is when God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, the son he loved more than life itself. Amazingly, Abraham was willing to do that in faith. He bound his son and laid him on the wood that Isaac had carried up the mountain for the burnt offering, and was ready to slay Isaac with a knife, when God stopped him and provided a ram as a sacrifice in place of his son.

What God did not require of Abraham, He required of Himself. He gave His only Son, the Son He loved, as the sacrifice to save us. **For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son.** "Of the Father's love begotten" for Jesus to join our family and die for us!

In the Church, celebrations such as Christmas are described as “festivals,” that is, feasts at which the Church eats. A lot of us might have a feast being prepared at home right now. Later, those family members who are able will gather to feast on the special food. That kind of feasting has always been associated with Christmas and other church festivals, but that has always been derivative of and secondary to the true feast.

The “Feast of the Nativity” is the divine worship service of the **Word made flesh and dwelling among** us in His body and blood of the Lord’s Supper. Because Jesus joined our human family, He was able to give His body and shed His blood on the cross for us and for our salvation and the forgiveness our sins that is received by us in the eating and drinking of His true body and blood in the Sacrament.

Of the two celebrations of Christmas, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, the Eve candlelight service with its Luke 2 Gospel and many carols is more satisfying to me emotionally: the lowly birth and manger; the shepherds and angels; and the holy family together. It is certainly the more popular of the services each year based on attendance.

But what the Eve service lacks is the body and blood of Jesus that He shares with you and me. Jesus is always the incarnate Christ, but that incarnate body and blood are only available to be orally eaten and drunk in the Sacrament. The Son of God joined our human family, our flesh and blood, and gives His sinless body and blood to forgive and save our sinful flesh, with the promise that one day our raised bodies will be like His glorious body. He shared in our death so we can share in His life. I can sing Christmas carols to God until my voice is hoarse, but God’s gift of the Word made flesh gives me life forever.

At Christmas we celebrate that, for us and for our salvation, God joined our human family, but also that He has adopted us into His family through His Son. **To all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were begotten, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but [begotten] of God.** The Word became flesh so we, who are flesh, can become the children of God.

To be **begotten of God** describes the work God the Father does to make us children by faith in Jesus. Though many English translations of John one describe us being “**born of God,**” giving birth is the work of mothers, not fathers. Fathers beget their children, something that the children play no part in, except to be begotten and then born of their mothers. God the Father begets us as His children through faith in Jesus, and this begetting is solely the work of God. Believing in the name of Jesus, we are given **the right to become children of God.**

So on Christmas we celebrate not only that the Son of God has joined our family, but also by faith in Jesus we are begotten as the children of God. God joins Himself to us in our family so we can be joined to His family. The Father of the only-begotten Son of God has become our Father. That is why we can pray the “Our Father,” the family prayer of all Christians. “With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is true Father and that we are His children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children as their dear Father.”

“Of the Father’s love begotten,” Jesus comes as our brother in the flesh. “Of the Father’s love begotten,” the glory of Jesus’ cross shines in the darkness of this world, and the darkness has not overcome it. “Of the Father’s love begotten,” Jesus gives us the right to become children of God. Amen.