

The Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord

25 December, Anno Domini 2023

St. John 1:1-14

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

Beloved chosen in Christ by the will of God

We are masters at missing the point, even though we claim to be so brilliant and enlightened. It's not that we are stupid or incompetent. It's because our reason and our senses are so confused and turned around by sin. Down is up and left is right. Murder is healthcare. Adultery is love. Truth is violence. Violence is peace. Is it any wonder then, that when the true light came into the world, the world didn't recognize Him and receive Him with great joy? Is it any wonder that the scribes and Pharisees, teachers of the Word of God, wouldn't rest until God, their great Deliverer, was hanging bruised and pierced from a Roman cross? Is it any wonder that the disciples stood in more awe of the massive buildings of the temple complex than of the Son of God wrapped in human flesh walking beside them? Is it any wonder that Israel gave up faith in the God who dwelt between the cherubim and trusted instead in the presence of the cherubim and the ark and the tabernacle?

“The natural man cannot understand the things of the Spirit because they are only understood by the Spirit.” The things of God are foolishness to man. Thus, when the forerunner points to Jesus of Nazareth as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the world is not impressed and, in fact, hates what they see. “This isn't the kind of God we want. We want a majestic God. We want a God that makes all of our problems go away and fills our bellies. We want a God that makes us happy.” Even Jesus needs to say to John “Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” All that this world measures to be wise and strong and successful is demonic and self-absorbed. Thus there is no place for the Christ-

child in the plans and purposes of the world and in the lives of those who love the world.

What greater foolishness could there be than God lying in a manger? Only that He is lying there as the One who would suffer the greater humiliation of death on the cross under God's wrath against our sin. Utter nonsense! Would you gladly suffer death in order that Hitler could live? And not only live but be viewed by all as completely innocent of all that he did? We hesitate to even die for a righteous man, let alone someone who hates us. Not God. God is love. Therefore, God has chosen the weak and foolish things of this world to shame the strong and the wise. This is the goodness and loving-kindness of God, our Savior. He does not despise what we actually are - weak, broken, wretched sinners filled with fear, overwhelmed by the reality that we do not have power over anything, even our own flesh. And not only does He not despise us, which is shocking enough considering how we have despised Him and turned to every manner of false gods to justify ourselves, but He took up our cause to save us from our self-imposed eternal destruction.

Only those willing to hear John the Baptist's searing and unvarnished judgment will receive with joy his testimony concerning Jesus, that Mary's Son is the long-awaited Messiah who has been sent by God to be the sin-bearer of the whole world. This humble carpenter's son, though there was nothing about Him to make us desire Him, was still the glory of the invisible God, the exact imprint of God's nature, in whom God has made known His grace and mercy. If you will humble yourself under the Law's righteous accusation, then you will not be offended by Jesus because you will know that He is exactly what you need and nothing less. You don't need impressive buildings made of the finest materials. You don't need a list of moral imperatives to show you how to make yourself better and save yourself. The Law makes it explicitly clear - you can't do anything to make yourself better.

What you need is a substitute - a man like you to live a perfectly holy life, obedient to God in all things, and then stand in your place and accept the punishment that is

rightfully yours because you have led an unholy life, disobedient to God in all things. No man born only of flesh and blood could do that because there is no one who does good, no, not one. Only God Himself is pure and unblemished. And to redeem you He has assumed your humanity into His divinity and offered Himself as the propitiation for your sins.

Through Christ, by the will of the Father, you have been made the children of God through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. That is the point. That is everything. You have been made alive by the will and work of God alone. You have been drawn out of the madness and backwardness of the world to see the true wisdom and strength of God which are seen most clearly in the manger and the cross. The Spirit of Christ has enlivened you and made you heirs of God's gracious kingdom. What was true of God's presence in the tabernacle erected with hands is infinitely more true in the tabernacle not made by human hand, Jesus' flesh - the dwelling place of God is with man. He dwells with you. He was and is and will always be Immanuel. He tabernacles here in His Word and under the bread and wine to save and strengthen you, to lead you through this wilderness of sin, and to guide you safely to your eternal home where He will be with you and you will live under Him in His kingdom in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. This is God's glory, that in grace and truth He dwells with us. This is our glory and the source of our joy this day and always. In Him this is indeed a most Merry and Blessed Christmas.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which surpasses all understanding keeps your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus.