

Christmas Day – 2021
John 1:1-18

What a glorious day. We celebrate today. The fullness of the deity dwells in bodily form. That is a majestic truth. What the cosmos cannot contain lowers Himself into the humble, finite, and vulnerable form of an infant. God visits humanity. The eternal Creator ventures into His creation as a creature – to render up His life. It is a mystery. It is the crux of love, the germinating seed of sacrifice, and the promise of an elevated life all wrapped up in one day, one event, one divine movement.

Remember, there were two trees in the Garden. God gave no command that Adam and Eve should not eat of the tree of life. It stood there resplendent. It stood there as an offering, a promise. The tree of life... what did it promise? It promised more. The tree of life promised more than what Adam and Eve, perfect Adam and perfect Eve, already possessed. Come to me and I will give you life. It was, however, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which attracted their attention. A fallen angel in the form of a serpent tempted the perfect woman. Eat this and you shall be like God. She ate it and became more like the tempter than like God. The tree of life was unchanged. It stood there resplendent, still promising an elevated life, eternal life – but now a threat was attached to it. If Adam and Eve were to eat of it in their fallen state, that is what they should ever be (forever corrupt, forever sinful, forever hurting others and being hurt). So God guarded it; guarded the tree and banished our fallen parents from the place where they were created.

Life was God's intent – real life, unassailable, unthreatened, unchecked life – He is the living and life-giving Creator. Man's fallen nature will not thwart His giving design. God doesn't hang His head and mope back to some dark corner of the cosmos, depressed and defeated (because Adam and Eve rebelled against Him, did what He told them not to do). He is going to go on giving. Life is what He is going to give. He intends to give it directly.

It is a common psychological trope to associate pride and insecurity. How many times have we seen on the silver screen, the overconfident jerk-face is the fellow who is haunted by intensely deep feelings of inadequacy, feelings that erupt to the surface when he's put in a corner? In the children's movie Shrek, adults snicker as the ogre looks at the overlarge building the villain has constructed and asks donkey: "Do you think he's compensating for something?" Conversely, there is a little Mary Engelbreit painting in our home that says: "Nothing is so strong as gentleness: Nothing so gentle as real strength." Divine life comes gently, ah but it is strong.

In Him was life. This child, this infant laid in a lowly manger, born to a no-account Israel young lass, He is supremely comfortable in His poverty. The low estate so many of us despise, He embraced. Pretension is absent, shame is absent; the Son of God comes to us precisely as He is – humble and full of grace. But this is new; since His conception He had been nestled in the ark of His mother's womb, hidden from view. Now He reveals His sacred face. Now life itself stands open to the world. Two natures – this child in whom true Life originates – He has two natures. God and man cohabitating the same person. The eternal Son of God laid aside all of His divine prerogatives and is content in our humanity. Within the form of a servant resides the omnipotent creative power of the universe.

Upon a manger filled with hay
In poverty content He lay;
With milk was fed the Lord of all,
Who feeds the ravens when they call.

That's Martin Luther – a Christmas hymn – putting the mystery of the Word made flesh into poetry.

He who Himself all things did make
A servant's form vouchsafed to take
That He as man mankind might win
And save His creatures from their sin.

It is counterintuitive; there is nothing about God's modus operandi that resonates with the heart of sinful man. Sequins; the fabulously glamorous wear sparkly things and strut on a catwalk. On occasion I have stumbled across a television show that is devoted to showcasing the homes of the wealthiest people on the planet. It is jaw-dropping. The first impression is simple amazement. Naïve, I never knew such wealth existed and what it can accumulate. Sadness then begins to settle in – what emptiness dwells in all that wealth. Sequins; the rural are partial to rhinestones but it is all the same empty glitter. Life is laid in a manger. Life is crucified on a cross. Life comes in simple bread and wine. Life is there for you – in those nondescript places.

The tree of life anticipates Christmas. The fruit of life dangled from a mangled Roman tree of torture. Life and death met on a Friday the Christian church calls good. That Good Day was nothing to look at. It was a mystery of the highest order. Life died. The Word made flesh was made a corpse. Our sin died in His body. The Father put it there. The Father who gave His Son into a world He truly loves, put our sin on His Son, His only Son, Whom He loves with an eternal affection and pride. The Word made flesh embraced that death. No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. Life laid down is a Christmas truth. Life taken up again is Easter breaking into a deep December day. There is nothing so strong as a crucified Christ. Nothing so gentle as a risen King. There were no sequins on Christ's cross. Likewise, there is no sadness on the day of resurrection. The Lord Christ is our wealth and Christmas tells us with profound clarity – we possess life and heaven is ours.

How many people will open a jewelry box today? Nice. Love certainly is conveyed in a gift. Socks and scarves, slot cars and Barbie dolls – wrapping paper and cinnamon rolls and mimosa – we are certainly going to celebrate today. What Christians celebrate is God's gift of His Son. How we celebrate is not the point. Joy will always find a way to celebrate. Joy turns away from the vanity of self, which is nothing but sequins, nothing but a lifeless tree; joy turns to the Word made flesh and celebrates life, His life. What is open today is Paradise. Should our earthly life end on this day, a new life will break open that is not subject to death. God shows Himself to be invested in what He gave Adam and Eve, invested in what you possess. Christ is the gate and He is open. Regardless of what you do today, God has you in view. Christmas declares that God is active. To protect you, God gives the world His Son. In humble form, in great humility – the Lord ventures into our low estate the whole way, vulnerable yet in charge, meek yet owning

creation. There is no gift like Him. There is no life like His. You are the beneficiary of these gifts. You are the beneficiary of Christmas.