

The Feast of the Nativity of our Lord  
25 December, Anno Domini 2018  
St. John 1:1-14  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A blessed Christmas to all of you. And it most certainly will be, it most certainly is, whether or not you got the new phone, diamond ring, or Cowboys season tickets you were hoping for. Even if your heart is still heavy because there is an empty seat at home that has been faithfully filled for many years, if your child is lying in the hospital bed hooked up to a breathing machine, if your family is being ripped apart by an argument, or if you don't know where your next meal is going to come from - it will still be a blessed Christmas because Christ has blessed it. Indeed it is blessed because Christ Himself born of human flesh and blood is the blessing. It will be blessed because in the midst of whatever darkness you find yourself in, Jesus Christ, the light of the world has come to bring you life and peace and hope where you thought none was possible.

That's what we celebrate this morning. We've gathered here this morning because we have a God who wants to be with us. We don't have a God who sits far off in the heavens on his throne unwilling to be burdened and bothered by our problems – problems that He didn't create in the first place. We don't have a God who says “I'll help you, but you have to help yourself first.” We don't have a God who treats us like we treat one another. We don't have a God who is unwilling to get himself dirty in our sin, in our pain, and our suffering. That's not what the angels filled the night sky to proclaim. That's not what the shepherds risked the welfare of their flocks to see.

No, we have a God who is with his people. We have a God who from the very beginning walked with Adam and Eve in the garden, enjoying what He had created. We have a God who, since day one has spoken with his people by his people by Adam by Seth by Abraham by Moses. We have a God who went before his people Israel, the pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, as he led them through the wilderness. We have a God who provided a place where his people could come meet and talk with him. Who, in a very real and physical way, came down to be with his people even as they were in the wilderness, even as they time and again grumbled and complained about how God supposedly wasn't taking care of them and questioned whether He was even with them. The same God who appeared to Moses in the burning bush descended on his tabernacle in the cloud. When that cloud was there, God was there. It wasn't just some empty symbol of his presence. Dear Christian, your God doesn't deal in empty symbols and representations. He is not symbolically your God and you are not symbolically His people. Those things were Him, truly with and among His people though it wasn't the way they wanted.

But still that wasn't enough - far more than we deserved, to be sure, but not enough for God. The cloud and the tabernacle were just the beginning, foreshadows of what was to come, something far greater, foreshadows of what we celebrate today. A baby. Some 2000 years ago God descended into the womb of the Virgin Mary and took up residence there - the Holy Spirit overshadowed her and by the power of the Word conceived in her womb the very Word Himself. He took our flesh, and dwelt among us as one of us. God couldn't get any closer to us than he did that day. There wouldn't be any more separation between God and man. “And this is not of our

own doing, so that no one can boast.” This is the gift of God which He has given out of us purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness on our part. God and man were forever united in this baby, the promised seed of the woman who would crush the serpent's head and deliver us from the curse of sin.

All creation should leap for joy at this news! God Himself now dwells among us! Yet, sadly, when the light of the world came all He found was darkness, darkness that was so pervasive and so thick and blinding, that the creatures that He had made, creatures that He once walked with didn't even recognize him. They didn't recognize the gracious Words of life and forgiveness and mercy that He spoke. They didn't recognize the works that He did - opening the eyes of the blind, raising people from the dead, driving out demons, forgiving sins. Worse yet, they hated Him. Even worse yet, we hated Him BECAUSE of these gracious words and works. We didn't want to be helped. We don't want God to come to us, not this way, not as a Savior. We want to ascend to God on our own merits and holiness. We were so wrapped up in our sin, wrapped up in ourselves, that we couldn't stand the voice that called us away and out of that darkness.

It's no different today. The world is lost in sin. We struggle inside ourselves with that same darkness, that same desire to think only of ourselves, and what will bring us pleasure. When God comes to us all he finds is darkness. There isn't singing and rejoicing. There's indifference and rejection. We have no light within us. We are dead in our sin and in our trespasses. Without the Spirit of God, the Lord and giver of life, we are incapable of comprehending or understanding the things of God. We can't see Christ. Only when we repent of the darkness that has swallowed us, can we then glory in the marvelous light of the babe of Bethlehem, in whom the hopes and fears of all the years. That baby was the answer to every prayer, every sad, lonely, bitter cry of distress and guilt and agony.

But the light is greater than the darkness. The light sends the darkness scattering. In its brilliance death and hopelessness cannot abide. Guilt and despair must leave you. Because in this light, all of Satan's works are exposed for the empty shadows that they are. In Christ, death is but slumber. In Christ, sin is taken away. In Christ, all our enemies have been overcome and are powerless to harm us. In Christ, the afflictions and crosses which are laid upon us are seen as the discipline and training of our loving Father.

This light of Christ has come to you has brought you life. God is with you. God is still Immanuel. No longer as a temple of stones, but a temple of flesh and blood. He still comes to be with his people in the midst of their darkness. That light shines on you again today and every day because your God is with you. You have a God who speaks to you. You have His word in the Holy Scriptures, the meek and lowly swaddling cloths in which He wraps Himself. He gives you shepherds who preach, who are living voices speaking God's word by God's own authority, pointing you to the signs that you shall mark - the water, the bread, and the wine. There you will find Jesus.

In the chaos of your life, you have Holy Baptism where God the Holy Spirit comes to you and makes His home with you. You are now his temple. You are now the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit who brings with you all the gifts and blessings which Christ has won by His cross. It is no longer you who live but Christ who lives in you, who comes into your ears and into your mouths

and takes up residence in you shining forth his light and that light is your life. You have a God who is with you. Your God is Emmanuel. He has made you children of God born not of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God. Now, behold his glory as he humbles himself and gives himself to you in His Holy Supper. Let His word resound in your ears "Given and shed FOR YOU for the forgiveness of sins." These words are spoken to you so that the dark lies of pleasing God by your works and your own goodness may be silenced, so that your conscience may be set free from the terror of judgment, so that you may bask forever in the warm, life-giving light of Jesus, the son of Mary, the Son of God.

In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.