

The Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord  
25 December, Anno Domini 2020  
St. John 1:1-14  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

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

Change is everywhere. No matter where you turn, be it medicine, technology, law, style - everything at least appears to be in a constant state of flux. And it is downright dizzying. Have you been able to keep up with all the mandates and recommendations from the government and medical community over the last 9 months, many of which have been contradictory? What about all the different lawsuits and accusations surrounding the election? Who isn't driven mad by the constant updates to their phone or computer? Nothing is constant. Nothing is stable. Nothing is really all that dependable. Change is a part of life. We go from infants to toddlers to children to adolescents and supposedly on to adulthood. Our food choices change. Our interests change. Our friends change. One day we are healthy and the next we are faced with a terminal illness. Fires and earthquakes and floods change the landscape in a matter of moments. And every day feels like a new cycle of chaos with unexpected challenges, joys, and disappointments. It's no wonder the world is filled with anxiety and depression. There doesn't seem to be anything we can count on. Everyone feels unsettled and on edge.

“In the beginning was the Word.” The Word which St. John speaks of is, of course, our Lord Jesus Christ before He took on our flesh, the pre-incarnate Word. John is speaking many thousands of years after that beginning, when there was no creation, only God. But that same Word, unchanged, the content of all God's speaking has been unchanged from the beginning. St. James writes of the Father in his epistle to the Church “there is no variation or shadow due to change.” And as there is no variation or shadow in the Father, there can be no variation or shadow in the Father's Word, who was with God in the beginning and is God from the beginning. What a relief to know that even as this creation spins off into chaos, continuing to come unraveled, the Word of God has never changed and will never change.

That means that the great joy of Christmas morn, that which causes our hearts to rejoice and our voices to sing out with extra vigor, is not anything new nor will the hope and promise of the Christ-child ever be taken away. The incarnation of God's Son is the very expression of God's will from the beginning. God's mercy and grace aren't a shift in God's thinking or way of acting. It is the express and eternal will of God that those whom He has created should be with Him and live eternally in His

presence. That was true before the Fall and that didn't change after the Fall. It will not ever change.

That God sent His Son to save us is not His Plan B. The baby in the manger is the same God who created all things. God's grace isn't new. God's grace created all things. God's grace promised Adam and Eve that though they deserved death, He would send the seed of the woman to crush the serpent's head and save them. God's grace brought Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. God's grace provided the tabernacle and the temple where God Himself promised to dwell among His people pouring out forgiveness from the mercy seat and hearing their prayers. God's grace sustained Israel in their years of exile though they had exiled the true God from their hearts and chased after the worthless idols of the nations.

No. It wasn't God that changed. Ever. It was man. It still is man. Our hearts are like reeds blown in the wind. Today our hearts trust in God, tomorrow they will look to science, to government, to reason, to our emotions to give them truth and life. The promises which God has spoken again today and bring comfort to our wearied souls, tomorrow will be cast aside along with the joy and peace those promises are meant to bring, just like the wrapping paper and the gifts it contains. Man who once walked in the garden with God turned away and ran into the open arms of the one who sought to destroy him, the author of chaos and uncertainty.

We are filled with variance and shadow. We are filled with and surrounded by instability. We are like a ship tossed about on the waves of the sea. And man was so lost in this shifting that when our Creator came we didn't even recognize Him. When He spoke, we didn't know His voice. We had come to love the chaos and so when He who is unchanged and unchanging entered the chaos, we resisted Him. We even killed Him. But we couldn't change Him. He is life and though death tried to change Him by swallowing Him, He only emptied death and made it an impotent form.

Dearly beloved, you who are wearied by the changes and chances of this life, maybe now more than you have ever been, you are invited to look into the manger and behold that which will never change, the Word of God made flesh for you, the unwavering goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior. Here is the fulfillment of the promise of the Father to deliver all mankind from the chaos and the tumultuousness of death. Here is the Father's assurance that even though heaven and earth pass away, you do not need to fear because His Word will never pass away. This Word, begotten of the Father from eternity and born of the Virgin Mary, is your Lord who has redeemed you. Though He took on human flesh, He was in no way changed. He is still very God of very God who, in a great mystery that cannot be understood but only believed, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and

was buried. And then, on the third day, He threw off the chains of death and rose triumphantly from the grave. He is a fixed anchor and all who cling to Him by faith will never be moved though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea. Christ's promises to you are as eternal as He Himself is.

The unbelieving world runs around in fear and dread, imagining that everything has changed because of the pandemic or the election or both. Nothing has changed because God and His promises haven't changed. You are no more in danger of death now than you were this time last year. Death has no power over your body or your soul. None who trust in the Word made flesh have any reason to fear. That is why this child was born. The angels said it. Jesus Himself said it. Do not be afraid. Or, as God spoke through the prophet Hosea "I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death. O Death, where is your victory? O grave, where is your sting?"

Even as the storms rage around you, as temptation would toss you here and there, there is still peace on earth, peace among God's people, because the God of peace is still among us. The Word which calmed the wind and waves on the Sea of Galilee silences the crashing waves of your guilt that would overwhelm you and sink you into despair and eternal death. He still stands among you as the crucified and risen Lord, giving You His Body and Blood as the ongoing promise of your forgiveness and salvation. That and that alone, the promise of God's love and mercy in Christ, will never change, though heaven and earth pass away, though all the world turn against you, though your own faith and courage wax and wain like the ocean tide. By His unchanging will, not your own unreliable one, you have been made His own dear child in Baptism. He chose you, from the before the foundations of the earth were even laid, and thus well before you had any say in the matter, not the other way around. And He will not change His mind. He doesn't change His mind when He forgives your sins. He doesn't change His mind that Christ was the sufficient sacrifice for your sins and the sins of the whole world.

This has always and will always be the will of God. Jesus given for you to redeem you and give you life was not a new idea with God nor will His work and promise to you ever change. Rather, He, your Lord and Brother, now sits at the right hand of God in the eternal heavens bearing the same flesh which He took on this day. From there He causes His promises and His blessings to be proclaimed to the ends of the earth and poured out in an endless flood through the Holy Sacraments. Behold in the manger the eternal Word of the eternal God, the unchanging center and source of God's grace and truth, who pours out life and salvation to all who believe in His Name. May the unchanging peace of the unchanging God our heavenly Father, given

to us through His unchanging Son, Jesus Christ, be and abide with you always and bring you safely to eternal life.

A blessed Christmas to you and may the unchanging peace of this day be yours always.

In the unchanging Name of +Jesus.