

CHRISTMAS DAY

John 1:9-13

In the darkness of the night, *in Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah*, “loves pure light, radiant beams from [His] holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace” was born. In the darkness, angels appeared and proclaimed “*good news of great joy.*” In the darkness of night, wise men followed a star to the One who made the heavens. In the darkness of night, Light burst forth onto the scene, God was born, and Isaiah’s prophecies, unfurled, were wrapped in swaddling clothes: “*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined... For to us a child is born, to us a son is given*” (Isaiah 9).

John writes, “*The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.*” Cute as we were at birth, we were in desperate need of light. Far from being children of God, St. Paul says we were “*children of wrath*” (Ephesians 2), born in sin, growing only better at it with practice. Only light could offer us aid, and there is only one Light, the Child resting in a manger, and all who are truly enlightened are enlightened by that Light. All else is darkness. And that Light has at long last come.

But what do we read next? “*He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.*” How sad! What a terrible world to live in, one that does not know its Creator, its Lord! But such is our world. Turn on the news for proof. Drive around a bit. Listen to the music that sells, the shows that bring in the ratings, the books that become bestsellers. How many express harmony between people, let alone with God? How many reflect the wisdom of God’s will or encourage obedience to it? How many properly diagnose the human predicament? How many provide godly solutions? What is much of it but clear proof that we have a world that’s its our moorings, that we are a creation that has forgotten its Creator, a humanity that no longer knows who we are or why we’re here? A world out of sync with its Maker can only be a world out of sync with itself. And what a sad world it is, yet precisely the world into which the Creator came, the Light, to break the darkness, to turn the night into day. Joy to the world, yes? Surely the red carpet was rolled out? Surely a room was made ready in the Hilton? Surely throngs made pilgrimage to greet Him? Surely with His coming we turned things around, don’t you think? “*He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.*”

And, sad to say, that’s not the worst part. John continues, “*He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.*” He came to Israel, His Old Testament people, the people He had led out of Egypt into the Promised Land, from slavery to freedom, from misery to hope, and they did not know Him. Not even they wanted anything to do with Him. He came to His own people, His own adopted children, and they had better ideas or things to do. No, not all outright rejected Him. That is, not all shook their fists and shouted mockery. Many just walked by too busy to notice. Many just didn’t care. But “*he came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.*” And they would have no excuse in God’s judgment. They were doubly guilty, beyond a doubt deserving of condemnation, for they knew better. And so do you.

“*He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.*” We are His own, His adopted children, His people, led from slavery to sin into the freedom of the obedience of faith, from the misery of the law to the hope of the gospel. We are His own, yet how often aren’t we too busy, or too indifferent? How often don’t we have better ideas or things to do? How it must grieve His loving heart, yet how little it too often grieves our callous hearts when we reject Him, and reject Him we do when we stray from His path even ever so little! We are for Him or against Him, and even one sin betrays our misplaced allegiance.

“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Are you children of God? Let me ask this: Do you bear a resemblance to Him? Where the will is, there are the pleasures? Have you found your greatest pleasures in Christ and in His Word or have your greatest pleasures been not unlike those of the world that did not know Him? Have you delighted in His law or in the breaking of it? Have you been content with this Child, or have you wanted more than Him, which is to want something less than Him? For instance, has this seemed less a Christmas to you because you’ve had less to spend or less to unwrap? This year have you looked like Him who we see born today, who we watch grow and preach and teach and suffer and die and rise in the Gospels, or do you look more like the citizens of that fallen world described earlier, who sadly do not know their Creator, who have not found the Light to see who they are and why they are here?

How do we become children of God? Let’s start with how we don’t. ***“Not of blood.”*** God doesn’t care who your Grandpa was, whether he laid a brick when this church was built or never missed a service in it. When the Jews claimed they were good with God because of their lineage, their DNA, because they were descendents of Abraham, Jesus told them, ***“If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did.”*** And, ***“If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here.”*** (John 8)

“Not of the will of the flesh.” The will of the flesh is the result of your first birth as a child of the Fall, of earthly parents, of flesh and blood. You must be born again of the Spirit. To those trusting in fallen reason, which is inherently inward-turned and self-serving reason, or finding their purpose in gratifying the desires of the flesh, St. Paul wrote:

The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit... Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Galatians 5)

Notice: ***“those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”*** Those are not trivial words. They ought to give us all pause.

Third, John says, ***“Not of the will of man.”*** No one can believe for someone else. No one can argue another into the Faith. We cannot be badgered into the Light, into salvation. For those who are here only to get Mom or Dad or Pastor or someone else off your back, I hate to say it, but you might as well not be here at all, unless, that is, you take advantage of your presence to listen and, Lord willing, take God’s message to heart. The Lord reminds us that no man or woman can save another, save Christ, when Ezekiel prophesies: ***“When a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I stretch out my hand against it and break its supply of bread and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast, even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness, declares the Lord God”*** (Ezekiel 14).

How then do we become children of God? Through this Child, the only-begotten Son of the Father. St. John writes, ***“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”*** Faith, like this Child is a gift. Don’t toss that gift away. Believe on Him. Believe in His name, that is, all that Scripture reveals about Him. Receive Him and through Him become again what Baptism first made you: a child of God. For this Light not only shines upon you, but opens your eyes and hearts to see it and bask in it. At what price? At no cost. The only price to be paid in the process is the One this Babe will pay for your sins on the cross. In the darkness of night, ***the true light, which enlightens everyone, has come into the world.*** Seize the day and embrace this Christmas, and God forbid for any of us it should become just another day. Amen.