



Introduction

Within the gospel reading's profound words lies the simple message that God is revealed in a human person. Though we may try to understand how the Word existed with God from the beginning of time, the wonder we celebrate at Christmas is that the Word continues to dwell among us. Christ comes among us in the gathered assembly, the scriptures, and the waters of new birth. Through these ordinary gifts we receive the fullness of God's grace and truth.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, one God,
Father, ✝ Son, and Holy Spirit,
who was in the beginning,
who makes a dwelling among us,
who covers us with justice and mercy. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Silence is kept for reflection.

God of goodness and lovingkindness,
**we confess that we have sinned
against you and our neighbors.**
We have turned away from your invitation to new life.
We have turned away from the lowly and downtrodden.
In your abundant mercy, forgive us our sins,
those we know and those known only to you,
for the sake of the one who came to live among us,
Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Hear the good news of peace and salvation!
God forgives us all our sins, not through our own work,
but through ✝ Jesus Christ, made known to all people.
With all who come to the manger,
rejoice in this amazing gift of grace. **Amen.**

Gathering Hymn ELW # 300 / LBW 56

The First Noel

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you have filled all the earth with the light of your incarnate Word. By your grace empower us to reflect your light in all that we do, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Jeremiah 31:7-14

God promises to bring Israel back to its land from the most remote parts of exile. In Zion Israel will rejoice over God's gifts of food and livestock. Young women will express their joy in dancing; God will give gladness instead of sorrow.

Read the text [here](#).

Psalmody: Psalm 147:12-20

- ¹²Worship the LORD, O Jerusalem;
praise your God, O Zion,
¹³**who has strengthened the bars of your gates
and has blessed your children within you.**
¹⁴God has established peace on your borders
and satisfies you with the finest wheat.
¹⁵**God sends out a command to the earth,
a word that runs very swiftly.**
¹⁶God gives snow like wool,
scattering frost like ashes.
¹⁷**God scatters hail like bread crumbs.
Who can stand against God's cold?**
¹⁸The LORD sends forth the word and melts them;
the wind blows, and the waters flow.
¹⁹**God declares the word to Jacob,
statutes and judgments to Israel.**
²⁰The LORD has not done so to any other nation;
they do not know God's judgments. Hallelujah!

Gospel: John 1:1-18

John begins his gospel with this prologue: a hymn to the Word through whom all things were created. This Word became flesh and brought grace and truth to the world.

Read the text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John all have different starting points in the life of Jesus.

Mark starts out with a quote from Isaiah about straightening the path. Verse 4 jumps to John the Baptist. Mark 1:9 begins the narrative of Christ's baptism and trials in the wilderness. Mark makes no mention of Jesus' childhood, going straight to a grownup Jesus and his ministry.

Matthew gives us a genealogy for Jesus through Joseph's family. Then Matthew goes into the story of the birth of Jesus. It is chapter 3 before Jesus starts his ministry.

As we have heard in the last few weeks, Luke writes about the interactions between God, Elizabeth, Mary, and the birth stories of John and Jesus. Similar to Matthew, it is in chapter 3 where Jesus starts his public ministry with being baptized by John.

As you have heard and read today, John starts out a completely different point in the story of Jesus' life. The Gospel today is known as the Prologue. The Prologue starts at the beginning of time as we know it. A part of John's purpose for writing the Fourth Gospel to emphasize Jesus' divinity. One thing may sound very familiar to you as the Prologue starts.

John 1:1, "In the beginning..." Those three words also start another famous book of the Bible, Genesis. The author goes on to show that the Word, aka Jesus, was with God prior to anything being created. The Word was with God and is a part of God, "of one being" with God. How is that possible? No one really knows. That is one of the beautiful mysteries of God. Why is that important? Christ could not do what he has done and will do if he was a created being. Christ is a part of the Triune God that creates everything.

Christ serves as the mediator between creation and God. As God the Creator and Sustainer spoke the cosmos into existence, it came into being through Christ. Christ advocates for all of creation, and Christ reveals God to creation. Without Christ, nothing would have come into being.

Yet Christ does even more. Christ is a beacon for the world. Christ is a truth that we can always rely upon. Christ provides a ray of light that enlightens the darkness of our thoughts, feelings, hearts, and world. The love of Christ shines into darkness throughout the world. Think of the brightness of a candle or flashlight when the power cuts off at night and it is dark. That is only one example of how bright God's actions through Christ shines throughout the world.

Also, Christ provides grace for all of us. He is an unlimited source of grace. It is always being offered by God the Father through Christ. As grace is used by a person, guess what happens? Twice as much replaces what is used. As far as we know, it could be 200 times as much grace that replaces it.

As we heard a week or so back in the Christmas readings, Jesus is born. Fully human and fully divine. God incarnate, in the flesh. God, in Jesus, literally walked the earth. He ate, slept, drank, and worked like all the people of the time then and the people now. It is a recalibration of things. To bring the world back in line. When Jesus came, the people with in and out of Israel did not recognize him as the Christ, the Messiah. Yet Christ continued to work, spread the Good News of God's unending Grace.

While the Mosaic Law did show God's love and grace to the world through Israel, the people could not live up to the intent of that law. Humanity had difficulty focusing on loving God and loving one another. God came down in human form as Christ to allow new ways of grace, love, and acceptance to flow upon and into creation. The restoration of creation, which includes us, comes through Christ revealing God to us and advocating for us with God.

Christ dies on the cross for us. Without Easter, Christmas would not be as valuable or important as it is now. Just think, God loves us enough to come down and become incarnate and die on the cross to redeem us. As it says in verse 12, all who believe in Jesus become the children of God. There is not any distinction made about wealth, skin color, political party, male or female, size, age. The acceptance of God's gift of faith and grace is all that appears to be required.

It is hard at times for us to remember God's love for us and for creation. Due to Covid and other problems in the world, we may feel scattered and hopeless, like the folks that Jeremiah wrote about in the early chapters. Yet Jeremiah also wrote about singing and dancing as the exiles return to Israel and Judah.

God will provide ways to make it through. Life will not always be easy, but God will guide us, for God created us and loves us.

John the Baptist points to Christ as the light and savior of the world. Look for the light. Enjoy those moments when there is peace. That is a glimpse of Christ loving and comforting us. Remember that the grace of God is unlimited. God wants to share the love and joy of being the children of God with all of us. Amen

Hymn of the Day ELW # 288 / LBW # 55 *Good Christian Friends, Rejoice*

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Nicene Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father, through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary
and became truly human .
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate.
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again in accordance with the scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Joining our voices with the song of the angels, let us pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

Redeeming God, you gather together your people from the farthest parts of the earth. Protect your church from stumbling. Let it not be overcome by sorrow, division, or despair. Make us radiant with goodness, that we might live always to the praise of your glory. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You bring together heaven and earth. All creation testifies to your splendor. Hold the ecosystems of this earth in delicate balance, from coastlands to farmlands, forests to wetlands, deserts to rainforests. Show us new ways to live in harmony with the world around us. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You overflow with grace upon grace. Expand the imaginations of those who serve in positions of authority. Open their hearts to the needs of their nations and communities. Protect all those in harm's way and those risking danger for the sake of others. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You bring consolation to those who weep. Embrace those who feel far-off, excluded, or defeated. Accompany those living with chronic and invisible illness. Sustain the weak and weary. Refresh those who labor under the weight of pain or sickness (*especially those we name now*). Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You come to us in the beauty of darkness and of light. Bring justice and reconciliation to communities divided by oppressions and misuse of power. Guide us to speak holy words of advocacy and truth. Help us to honor your image in one another. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

You turn our mourning into joy. We give thanks for those who have died in faith. With all the saints, give us our inheritance in Christ. In the fullness of time, gather us all together in your mercy. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of mercy, come quickly to us with grace upon grace as we lift these and all our prayers to you, in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Closing Hymn ELW # 300 / LBW # 70

Go Tell it On the Mountain

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Vicar Mike Lang.