

CHRISTMAS 1, A – December 29, 2019
SCRIPTURES – Isaiah 63:7-14; Gal. 4:1-7; John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” John 1

Today is December 29, and we are on the verge of a new year. For many in our world, Christmas with its special “spirit,” its sense of wonder and joy that children and adults hope to find again, is behind us and is quickly fading away in the rear-view mirror. The New Year is just ahead, and it brings no similar sense of mystery but a full-blown, let it all hang out bacchanalia. It’s party time!

God brings us into the New Year in the light of the on-going celebration of Jesus’ birth... and by His Scriptures – especially the 1st chapter of John’s Gospel – God plunges us deeply into mystery... the mystery of the eternal God who is now flesh.

“In the beginning was the Word.” This is how John introduces us to Jesus. He is far more than simply a new-born baby. He is **“the Word [who] was with God, and the Word [who] was God...”** always! Jesus is with, and is, the eternal God! And, He not only is. He is active; always. **“All things were made through him... and in him was life.”** Life for all, and not just Himself. Life for you! You live because God wills it... because He gives you life. And, as Jesus is the eternal God, He wills eternal life for you.

This, too, is a mystery. We certainly do not see or feel eternal life. No, we see and feel it’s opposite: decline and death. But, don’t try to avoid this by putting it in the rear-view mirror and focusing on life’s pleasures. There’s no denying that sin and death are among us and within us. We see them all the time. We feel them often. They are far from all there is, however, or even the last word. Jesus, the Word of God, **“the life [and] the light of men,”** is the last, and lasting, Word. For, **“the light shines in the darkness”** – in the darkness of every day and every age, including ours – **“and the darkness will not overcome it.”**

“He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him,” John 1 tells us. He has always been present in and shining in our world. **“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.”** His own were the people of Israel; He was present with them in a special way. Isaiah 63 speaks of the special presence of Jesus – indeed, of each Person of the Holy Trinity – with Israel. I have laid this out for you to see [see the last page of the sermon]. **“I will recount the steadfast love of the Lord,”** Isaiah begins.

1. Then, in vs. 8: **“He said, ‘Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely.’”** Who calls someone his children? Their father! It is God the Father speaking here. Vss. 11-12 say that God **“put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit [and] caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses.”** God the Father; the Holy Spirit; and God’s glorious arm: the Triune God was saving the Jewish people from Egypt!

2. Isaiah goes on to say in vss. 8-9, **“And he became their Savior... the angel of his presence saved them.”** This is God the Son. He is the angel, or messenger (that is what the word “angel” literally means), of God’s presence. Ex. 14:19 tells us of the Angel of God going before and behind the host of Israel as they left Egypt. In Is. 63:12 He is called God’s **“glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses.”** Moses praised this mighty right hand of God after He parted the Red Sea and brought the people safely through it while destroying the Egyptian army (Ex. 15:6). This glorious arm and mighty right hand of God is Jesus; He who is one with God and is God! Understanding this, the apostle Paul wrote (1 Cor. 10:1-4): **“I do not want you to be unaware that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.”**
3. Finally, Isaiah says that God the Father put the Holy Spirit into the midst of the people of Israel. He was the pillar of cloud and fire that went before, and at times behind, them; the God against whom they rebelled and grieved.

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit has always been active and present in our world and in the lives of His people. But 2,000 years ago, through the willing service of the Virgin Mary, God the Son alone became present and active among us in a new way: **“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”** The eternal Word, the eternal Light, became a human being. What a mystery! But, why? That **“from his fullness we [might] all receive grace upon grace,”** John says. Grace upon grace. Gift upon gift.

The first grace Christ offers us is His flesh: a pure and holy flesh for we who in our very natures are sinful and unholy. We cannot be pure in our thoughts and desires, and this impurity is seen in our selfish, and so sinful, actions.

- We rebel against God the Holy Spirit by not listening to God’s words and believing them, choosing to follow our own desires instead.
- We reject our good Father’s rule to rule ourselves. Every sin of yours is a rejection of God’s Fatherhood!

So, God the Son becomes flesh, and in His flesh He learns God’s words and follows them. He honors and obeys His Father’s good rule in His heart, and so also in His actions. This full obedience, which includes His acceptance of the consequences of disobedience – **“if you sin, you will die,”** God says, and so Jesus bears our sins and dies for them – Jesus offers to you and me. **“To all who received him, who believed in his name, He gave the right to become children of God,”** the apostle John writes. Through faith in Him you receive His holy flesh! It is yours!

And so is His relationship with His Father. John 1 says that those who believed in his name **“were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”** The second grace, or gift, that Jesus gives to us is His divinity. How great is the mystery: the eternal Word became flesh that our mortal flesh might be joined to

God and become eternal! This is a mystery that will never fade away in the rear view mirror, no matter how many days we are from Christmas, or from the days that Jesus walked upon this earth. ***“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men,”*** John says (John 1:3). Remain in the words of Him who is the eternal Word, and His life and light will become ever brighter as your times increase and the New Year of His return approaches.

This makes Christmas merry, now and always. It brings us into a year that is truly new. Made new in Jesus, our works are holy and our times are holy. Our very lives are holy! For ***“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”*** Thanks be to God! Through Jesus Christ, the eternal Word and our eternal Lord. Amen!

Isaiah 63:7-14

⁷ I will recount the steadfast love of the Lord, the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. ⁸ For he said, “Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely.” And he became their Savior. ⁹ In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

¹⁰ But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them. ¹¹ Then he remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit, ¹² who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, ¹³ who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble.

¹⁴ Like livestock that go down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord gave them rest. So you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name.



Isaiah 63 – the presence of the Triune God in the Old Testament.

1. God the Father.

- *He said, "Surely they are my people, children..." (vs. 8)*
- *Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit, who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, who led them through the depths? (vss. 11-12)*

2. God the Son.

- *the angel [messenger] of his [God's] presence saved them... (vs. 9)*
- *who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses... (vs. 12; see Ex. 14:19)*
 - ¹⁹ *Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, ²⁰ coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night. (Ex. 14:19-20)*
- *1 Cor. 10:1-4: "I do not want you to be unaware that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ."*

3. God the Holy Spirit.

- *they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit... (vs. 10)*
- *who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit... (vs. 11; see Ex. 13:21-22; 14:19-20)*
 - ²¹ *And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. ²² The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people. (Ex. 13:21-22)*
- *the Spirit of the Lord gave them rest. (vs. 14)*