

## CHRISTmas Day (12/25/11 – *The Enfleshed Word Dwells among Us*)

In the Name of JESUS. [Amen]

Today we celebrate a great mystery – greater, even, than might first appear. Today we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Today we rejoice that *The Enfleshed Word Dwells among Us*. This is a great mystery, indeed! The Divine takes on the human. The Otherworldly takes on the tent of this world. The Eternal comes in time. The Omnipotent becomes a defenseless Infant. The Infinite and Omnipresent is confined in a small, lowly manger. The Bread of Life from heaven comes to Bethlehem (i.e., to an earthly ‘house of bread’).

However, there is more to this mystery. For this is not just **some** mysterious occurrence. This is not just **some** incredible event. It is **THE event** – the event of **all** events ... one that impacts and defines **all** of human history. *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.* [JN 1.14] The eternal Son of God – the eternal Word – became Man to make His habitation among us earthly creatures. He has all of our needs and all of our weaknesses. He is subject to all of our temptations – yet remains *without sin* [HEB 4.15].

The reality that we commemorate this morning ought to make us truly humble, truly contrite, truly repentant all year round. That God would become Man in order to be with us and save us from our sin is truly amazing! It marks our weakness ... but God’s greatness. It reveals our sinfulness ... but God’s holiness. It shows forth our need of compassion ... but God’s loving mercy. Before this reality of God enfleshed, we should humble ourselves continually ... not to mention give thanks and bow in fear and awe.

I would submit, however, that we humans are often guilty of not having enough awe and righteous fear of God. Even as believers, we ought to fear God’s righteous punishment of our sin. If we would truly *fear, love, and trust in God above all things*, we might think twice about doing the very things He has commanded us not to do. Though the proper motivation for godly living is the Gospel – God’s love for us in Christ Jesus – still our sinful flesh needs to be curbed now and again by the fear of punishment. And we certainly ought to

stand in awe before God and His Holy Altar. We always ought to marvel at the power and glory of God, even as we continually ought to be amazed at the magnitude of His love and mercy for us in Christ Jesus ... and never take that mercy for granted (unlike we do so very often).

This brings me to another mystery that we celebrate today. For you see, it is not just astonishing that *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*. Before that reality, we must bow in awe. Yet as amazing as that is, there is another reality that is – in some respects – even more extraordinarily impressing. For just as our Lord descended from heaven and dwelt among the people of Bethlehem, Judea, and Jerusalem during His walk on earth, so now our Lord descends from heaven to dwell among us in His Word and especially in the Sacrament of Holy Communion that we are about to celebrate.

Here in the Holy Supper, *The Enfleshed Word Dwells among Us*. The Living Bread of Heaven that came down to give life to the world comes down now to be in the bread of the Sacrament ... to give us life and eternal salvation. **This** house of God is made a new Bethlehem – a new ‘house of bread’. Our Altar becomes a new manger, where the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is cradled. And just as Mary held the Infant Savior in her arms and beheld His glory, so we take and eat and drink our Lord in the Sacrament and behold His glory, since He gives us His Body and the Blood He shed for us and for our salvation.

Just as Simeon beheld the Infant Christ in the temple, so we behold Christ in this sanctuary. Just as Simeon looked upon the Salvation of the world – the *Light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of [God’s] people, Israel* [LK 2.32] – so we behold our Savior coming to us in bread and wine, enlightened by the Holy Spirit with the knowledge of the forgiveness of sins. As Simeon was able to *depart in peace* [LK 2.29], so we depart the presence of our Savior in peace, with the assurance that in Christ there is *peace on earth and goodwill toward men* [LK 2.14].

Today – at this time and in this place – we are caught up in the mystery that *The Enfleshed Word Dwells among Us*. For just as Christ came once in the flesh, so also now He comes in His Body and Blood, mystically hidden in, with

and under the bread and the wine, given *for us Christians to eat and to drink ... for the forgiveness of sins.*

For us who celebrate *Christmas* – CHRIST Mass – in true repentance and faith, it is like that first *Christmas Day* all over again. Our Lord truly comes to us in His Flesh and Blood. He comes to us now, just as He came long ago – to bring us peace with God and eternal salvation. And just as surely as He once came, so surely may we be certain that *The Enfleshed Word Dwells among Us* still – especially here in this place – and ... that He **will** come again to take us to be with Him eternally.

This is the reality we celebrate not only today, but also **every** time we are gathered in Christ's Name and at His command. We rejoice in this reality each time we are gathered by the Holy Spirit as the people of God in this place. Our gracious Savior comes to us and *The Enfleshed Word Dwells among Us.*

As we gather around Christ's Altar this morning, ponder this most blessed truth – that He is present among us, in the bread and wine, bringing us forgiveness, life, and eternal salvation. As we sang the *Gloria*, we cried out with the heavenly angels who announced the good tidings of great joy, saying: *Glory be to God on high and on earth peace, good will toward men.* As we kneel in this House of the Bread during Holy Communion, we kneel before our Lord with the shepherds who knelt in Bethlehem that first *Christmas* and have gone to kneel before God eternally in heaven.

Truly, this is a great and blessed mystery that we celebrate today – the mystery of the *Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ* ... of God becoming Man ... of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us. Yet as great as that mystery is, just so great is the mystery of Christ's continual coming to dwell among us in the Sacrament of the Altar. Through these mysteries, our Lord has prepared **the way for us** and prepares **us for the way** of His salvation ... including His final coming to us in glory, when He will take us to enjoy His presence in the eternal Feast. *The Enfleshed Word Dwells among Us.* Thanks be to the Savior Who is Christ the Lord!

*Hear! The Conqueror has spoken:*

*“Now the foe,*

*Sin and woe,*

*Death and hell are broken!”*

*God is man, man to deliver,*

*And the Son*

*Now is one*

*With our blood forever.*

Paul Gerhardt, *Lutheran Service Book*, #360 st.2

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]