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Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY
Christmas Day
December 25, 2023
Text: John 1:1–18

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In the name of Jesus ... A blessed and Merry Christmas to you all!!

Yesterday morning, I said that you cannot understand John the Baptist without reference to Jesus. On this Christmas morning, we hear yet again that John gave witness to Jesus. The gospel of John, the apostle John, tells us that John the Baptist was a man sent from God. He was to bear witness to the light so that all men might believe in God unto salvation. John preached about a divine Light that would enlighten everyone in the world. This Light was no ordinary light consisting of photons streaming through the universe. This Light was with God in the beginning. The light we see with our eyes is but a copy, a reflection of He who is the true light. Don't misunderstand my use of language here. God's eternal Son is the uncreated Light; the divine, eternal Light who made all things. The light we see with our human eyes, is a brilliant reflection of Him who is the Light of life. John the Baptist came "to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him" (vs. 7).

We put lights on our Christmas trees and around our houses during this blessed season. Do we do this simply because light is beautiful and darkness frightening? Well, psychologists and cultural anthropologists may try to give some scientific sounding answer to this question. Something like...when humans were simple hunter-gatherers living in caves or crude huts, the darkness of night was terrifying because of fierce predators. The darkness became associated with primal forces of evil, danger, and death. While the light from the sun and the light of fire by night brought safety, warmth, and allowed them to cook their food. I don't find such arguments convincing. We humans love the light because, according to vs. 4, "In him (the Word, the Son

of God) was life, and the life was the light of men.” Light reminds us of God and the life He gave to us in our original creation and restores again through saving faith in Jesus. The lights on our trees, the lights around our houses, the candles on our altars, even the candles we used in last night’s service while we sang Silent Night, all point to Him who is the Divine light: the eternal Word through whom the Father created the world.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Those are the first five verses of John’s prologue.

Life and light come from the eternal Word who is God’s beloved Son from all eternity. John the Baptist gave witness to that Light and Life. All life comes from the eternal Word through whom the Father spoke the universe into existence. As Christ the Word spoke, the Holy Spirit hovered over creation as the Lord and giver of life. Light and life came into creation through Christ the Word from the Father by the Holy Spirit. Not only did Christ, who is light and life, give Himself to His creation in the beginning, He continues to do so to this very moment. Be content to remain a creature of God. Rejoice in your created-ness. For in creating you as you are, God gives of Himself. His light, His life, and His love.

John the Baptist bore witness to this diving Light by preaching repentance and baptizing for the forgiveness of sins. Unlawful tyrants entered this world. Sin, Satan, evil, Death, and misery. We humans invited them to come among us. But their tyranny brought darkness and gloom. “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 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” (vs. 9–13). What a strange mystery. The creation did not know its Creator. The reason is that God’s beautiful creation embraced darkness rather than light. But the darkness of Satan and evil could not overcome Him who is the Light and Life of men.

John preached about this divine Light. And to all who received His preaching and were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins, they became children of God. They became children of light. And so, we are back to what I mentioned earlier...we desire light because we were made by Him who is Light and Life. And this is especially true for us Christians. Through the revelation of God’s Word and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we know who this Light is: the Word who was with God, the Word who is God, the eternal Son of God the Father almighty.

Knowing this truth about who the Word is, makes John 1:14 perhaps one of the greatest surprises in the entire Bible. “And the Word (i.e., He who is Light and Life, the eternal Son of the Father) became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from Father, full of grace and truth” (vs. 14). This is simply staggering. Much of what I have said about light and life and their relationship to the divine could have been said by philosophers. But the message of the Christmas gospel takes us into an even greater mystery. God the Word, the light and life of men, became a human baby boy Mary’s womb. He was born in Bethlehem of Judea during the reign of Caesar Augustus.

That infant boy in Bethlehem’s manger is true God, “begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God...” No darkness of sin can overcome this Light. He is brighter than the darkness of our sin-stained souls. He is stronger than the Death that comes to us raging with invincible destruction. Jesus is the Light and Life who overcame them all. This victory He achieved, not through some awesome display of power, but through great weakness. The Word became flesh. The flesh of an infant, helpless, and dependent. And yes, the flesh of the Word of God was broken, bled, and died on a Roman Cross in order to give us the greatest gift of all:

faith, life, and hope in Him as Lord and Savior. The flesh of the Word of God rose from the dead to give us flesh and blood human beings justification before God the Father and participation in the Son's light and life.

The baby born in Bethlehem is no ordinary Child. He is the eternal Word of the Father through whom all things were made. He is the Light before there was light. He is the Life through whom all life exists. The Jesus, born of Mary, is the eternal Son of the Father. This Jesus is the light and life of God come in human flesh. Ponder this great mystery as we prepare to receive the body and blood of the Word made flesh for the forgiveness of our sins in Holy Communion.

Receive these gifts today. Christ gives Himself, His life and His light which overcomes Death and all Darkness. These gifts give the real, lasting joy of Christmas. A Merry Christmas to you all!!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.