



Merry  
Christmas

December 25, 2021

*“Thanks for the gift, but what is it?” The readings for the Festival of Christmas tell us what God’s Christmas gift is. Many heresies that plagued Christianity throughout the centuries sprang from an incorrect answer to this question. The Athanasian Creed answers: “He is God, eternally begotten from the nature of his Father, and he is man, born in time from the nature of his mother, fully God, fully man, with rational soul and human flesh.” If this child is God and man in one person, then he is exactly what the human race needs to deliver it from its enemies of sin, death, and Satan.*

## *The Festival of Christmas*

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### **HYMN**

*Joy to the World* | #138

### **GOSPEL READING**

Luke 2:1–14

<sup>1</sup>In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governing Syria. <sup>3</sup>And everyone went to register, each to his own town. <sup>4</sup>And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the town of Nazareth, into Judea, to the town of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was from the house and family line of David. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, his wife, who was pledged to him in marriage and was expecting a child.

<sup>6</sup>And so it was that while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

<sup>8</sup>There were in the same country shepherds staying out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock at night. <sup>9</sup>An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified! <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. For behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all people: <sup>11</sup>Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>And this will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup>Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude from the heavenly army, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup>“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind.”

## INVOCATION

P: The Word became flesh and lived among us,

**C: and we have seen his glory,**

P: the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father,

**C: full of grace and truth.**

P: Glory to God in the highest

**C: and on earth peace, good will toward mankind!**

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**C: Amen.**

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

P: Thank you, loving Father, for filling the world with the new light of your Word who became a human being. Keep the flame of faith and love burning in our hearts so that we also may shine as lights in the world. For he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

## OLD TESTAMENT READING

Exodus 33:18-23; 34:5-7

*God's promises to Israel depended on God being present to do the work of keeping them. Moses asked for ratification of the Lord's commitment by the unveiling of his glorious presence. God gave Moses only a glimpse.*

<sup>33:18</sup>Then Moses said, "Please show me your glory."

<sup>19</sup>The LORD said, "I will make all my goodness pass in front of you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD in your presence. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy." <sup>20</sup>He said, "You cannot see my face, for no human may see me and live."

<sup>21</sup>The LORD also said, "Look, there is a place next to me, where you shall stand on the rock. <sup>22</sup>It will happen that, while my glory passes by, I will put you in a crevice in the

rock. I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. <sup>23</sup>Then I will take away my hand, and you will see my back. But my face will not be seen." ...

<sup>34:5</sup>The LORD came down in the cloud. He took his stand there with Moses and proclaimed the name of the LORD. <sup>6</sup>The LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and overflowing with mercy and truth, <sup>7</sup>maintaining mercy for thousands, forgiving guilt and rebellion and sin. He will by no means clear the guilty. He calls their children and their children's children to account for the guilt of the fathers, even to the third and the fourth generation."

## ANTHEM

*Break Forth, O Beauteous Heav'nly Light*

*Break forth, O beauteous heav'nly light,  
And usher in the morning.  
Ye shepherds, shrink not with affright,  
The day of grace is dawning.  
This Child, though weak in infancy,  
Our confidence and joy shall be,  
The pow'r of Satan breaking,  
Our peace with God now making.*

*O dearest Child, whom I adore,  
Whose grace surpasses measure,  
My Brother, whom I cherish more  
Than earth with all its treasure:  
Haste from Thy manger to depart,  
O come and dwell within my heart;  
With joy will I receive Thee,  
A cradle there will give Thee.*

## NEW TESTAMENT READING

Romans 8:31–32

*God's Christmas gift comes with secondary gifts, like the bike that also comes with a helmet and lock. Far more than a few minor bonus presents, everything in all creation and every event in all of history have become God's gift to us along with his Son.*

<sup>31</sup>What then will we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup>Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all —how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him?

## HYMN

*Now Sing We, Now Rejoice* | #135

## SERMON

John 1:1–14

*God's first act of creation in the beginning was light —necessary so humanity could see the glory of the rest of his creation. The incarnation is another beginning —a light necessary so fallen humanity could once again see God's glory.*

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup>Through him everything was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. <sup>5</sup>The light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup>There was a man, sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as an eyewitness to testify about the light so that everyone would believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.

<sup>9</sup>The real light that shines on everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup>He came to what was his own, yet his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. <sup>13</sup>They were born, not of blood, or of the desire of the flesh, or of a husband's will, but born of God.

<sup>14</sup>The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

## HYMN

*Rejoice, Rejoice This Happy Morn* | #142

## STATEMENT OF FAITH—ATHANASIAN CREED

*The ancient church wrote this creed to define the minimum belief necessary to be considered Christian. This morning we will use only the second half of this lengthy creed: that Jesus is true God and true man and that he is our Savior.*

P: Let us confess our holy faith in the words of the Athanasian Creed:

It is necessary for eternal salvation that one also faithfully believe the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Therefore it is the true faith that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at once God and a human being.**

He is God, begotten from the substance of the Father before all ages, and a human being, born from the substance of his mother in this age.

**He is perfect God and a perfect human being, composed of a rational soul and human flesh.**

He is equal to the Father with respect to his divinity, less than the Father with respect to his humanity.

**Although he is God and a human being, nevertheless he is not two but one Christ.**

However, he is one not by the changing of the divinity in the flesh but by the taking up of the humanity in God.

**Indeed, he is one not by a confusion of substance but by a unity of person.**

For, as the rational soul and the flesh are one human being, so God and the human being are one Christ.

**He suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose from the dead,**

ascended into the heavens, is seated at the right hand of the Father, from where he will come to judge the living and the dead.

**At his coming all human beings will rise with their bodies and will give an account of their own deeds.**

Those who have done good things [accomplished only through faith] will enter into eternal life, and those who have done evil things into eternal fire.

**This is the Christian faith; a person cannot be saved without believing this firmly, and faithfully.**

## CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

P: Friends in Christ, let us confess our sins to God our Father, because Jesus Christ came to earth as a human being for us, to take away our sins.

**C: Lord God, our heavenly Father, I confess that I have sinned against you, not only in my words and actions, but also in my secret thoughts and desires which I cannot fully know or understand, but which you know completely. I am sorry that I have displeased you, and repent of the evil I have done. For the sake of your dear Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, have mercy on me, forgive my sins, and graciously help me in my weakness. Amen.**

P: Lift up your hearts unto God! Almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy upon us, and has given his only Son to die for us, and for his sake forgives us all our sins. To all who believe on his name he gives the power to become the children of God, and has promised them his Holy Spirit. He who believes and is baptized will be saved. Grant this, Lord, unto us all. Amen.

## HYMN

*Thy Little Ones, Dear Lord, Are We* | #144: v.1–2

**choir v.3–4**

congregation v.5–8

## OFFERING AND PRAYER

P: Heavenly Father, thank you for all the good things you continue to provide for us. Don't let us take your gifts for granted or abuse them. Instead, help us always to rely on you in faith. Use us and what you have given us for your good purposes. Amen.

## LORD'S PRAYER

**C: 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.**

## HYMN

*The Happy Christmas Comes Once More* | #143: v.1, 5-6, 9

## BENEDICTION

**P: Christ the Son of God give you joy and peace by his presence with you. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.**



**C: A - men, a - men, a - men.**



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