

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

I don't know if you've heard, but apparently, a war is going on. No, I'm not speaking of what is happening in Ukraine or elsewhere in the world, but something is happening right here in our own country. You can find it in the headlines. I've been told that there is a war...on Christmas. Politicians, commentators, and religious leaders all talk about this war on Christmas. This war is supposedly waged by secularists, humanists, and atheists seeking to undermine American values and get Christianity out of the public square.

We might be tempted to agree with them. What's wrong with having nativity scenes and other religious symbols on public property or saying "Merry Christmas" to anyone you meet? Why can't we have Christmas programs in our schools and songs on our radio? But Christmas is not about keeping Christianity in the public square, nor is it primarily a question concerning the religious-based morality of the American people. It is not about American, religious, or even Christian traditions. When we make it about those things, we wage quite a war against Christmas ourselves. That is because Christmas is about God becoming a man.

Listen to the wonder of John. "In the beginning," he writes. Just as Moses wrote, so John wrote. Moses wrote, "In the beginning God." John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word." Does John mean to suggest that the Word was God? He does more than suggest; he comes right out and says it. "And the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Why does he first say that the Word was with God, and then that the Word was God? Which is it? Was He with God, or was He God? The answer is both. The Word was with the Father as a person distinct from the Father. And yet He was God, equal to the Father. As the Father is, so is the Word.

Now we speak words, often when we shouldn't. But they go out of our mouths and disappear. They may be recorded and remembered for a time, but eventually, they are lost to history. The words we speak may be important or useless. They may be true or false. Whatever we say, it comes from within. It reveals who and what we are. Our words speak for us. That's what words do.

And the Word who was with God, who was God, reveals God. But this Word does not disappear, nor can He be false. He is eternal. This Word that is God and the Word that He speaks go together. God speaks, and Moses records, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." How? He spoke. "Let there be," and there was. The psalmist declares, "By the Word of YHWH were the heavens made." And St. John explains, "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 nothing was made that was made."

God alone is eternal. God alone is uncreated. When John writes that all things were made through the Word and without Him nothing was made that was made, he is saying with as much clarity as words can express that the Word is God. All that exists is either the Creator or His creation. By belaboring the point, as John does, the apostle teaches that the Word is the God who Creates. And the message of Christmas is that this Word, who was with God, this Word, who was God, this Word, through whom all things were made, has become one of us. "The Word became flesh." He became human. He became our brother.

As the hymnist writes: "Highest, most holy, Light of Light eternal, Born of a virgin, a mortal He comes; Son of the Father Now in Flesh appearing! O Come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord."

Can it be true? How can it be true? How can God, whom the whole universe cannot contain, become a little baby? How can He, through whom all things were made, join His own creation by taking on flesh and blood? How can the Almighty become a little infant dependent upon His mother for His very life? How? God does not say. We cannot understand. But we can know. Yes, we can know that it is so.

John writes, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

God is invisible. He lives in an unapproachable light. No one can see Him. He is too far above us for us to reach Him. Even if we pray, how will we know that He hears? And if we suffer, how will we know that He cares? If we sin, does He judge us for it? And if we feel the judgment of our own conscience, how will we know that He can bring us peace? God is too far above us. He is transcendent. We are stuck right here. And we’re not going anywhere.

Try as hard as we might, we cannot make our way to where God. Every time we try it leads to death and damnation. Sinners cannot sanctify themselves. They cannot save themselves. When they seek out God on their own, they fall into idolatry, and that false god cannot save them because the glory of the true God destroys anyone who is not pure and holy as He is pure and holy.

That is why the hymnist cries out, “Come from on high to me; I cannot rise to Thee. Cheer my wearied spirit, O pure and holy Child; Through Thy grace and merit, Blest Jesus, Lord most mild, Draw me unto Thee! Draw me unto Thee!” Listen to John. He was there when the Word became flesh. He writes, “We beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.” We saw God. He, who transcends space and time, stands here with us in *our* space and time. He stands as one of us. He chose to become our brother to bring us to the Father. This is His glory.

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.” Glory to God in heaven is joined to peace toward us on earth. The glory that Jesus revealed is of God’s goodwill, His favor, His grace, His wholly undeserved kindness toward us all. This is the message of Christmas. This is the true meaning of this holiday. Billions of dollars invested and spent, political debates about public manger displays, greenery everywhere, the sounds of bells, driving down congested streets bumper to bumper in the frantic effort to get it all done before we run out of time, these are but distractions. The true message of Christmas is that God has joined the human race.

He came to do for us what we failed to do for Him. It was our duty. We know it. We can hardly blame the troubles of life on everyone else. If there is hatred in the world, what do I find within my own heart? If there is envy and covetousness in this world, what is it my eyes see that I want more than I want to help my neighbor? If there is betrayal, have I broken my promises? Consider all the evil we bemoan, everything that would keep us from feeling full of grace and goodwill. Must we not acknowledge our own responsibility for it?

But here is God. He doesn’t come to give you what your sins deserve. He comes in peace. He is not so far away that you cannot see Him or know Him or have Him as your own. He is in a manger, a helpless little baby. But He is the almighty God, come to set you free. He is the pure and holy babe of Bethlehem. But He will face your sins. He will bear your guilt. He will offer up His pure and holy life on Calvary for sinners like you and me. Here is God in the flesh. Here is divine glory. Here is grace and truth.

Grace and truth go together. It’s not a matter of keeping religious symbols in the public square so that we can stick it to those who don’t believe. No, Christmas is about grace and truth. Only when God is gracious to us, for Christ’s sake, can the truth be our friend. The truth is that apart from Christ, we are lost and powerless to find our way back to God. But grace and truth go together. The truth is that God has joined the human race to bring us His grace and forgiveness of sins. It is new life. It is comfort within. It is peace. All this given to us in the God who became a baby, a boy, a man, our brother, our Savior. Amen.