

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth...(John 1:14)

I dearly love St. Luke's version of the Christmas story — the evening version — with the shepherds abiding in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night, the heavenly host glorifying God and singing of peace on earth, and our Savior born as a babe in Bethlehem's manger. But this morning-time Christmas version is important too. It comes from St. John and is a chief Biblical text for the sublime doctrine of the Holy Incarnation of our God.

Our statue of St. John stands before you — the right-hand figure in our reredos. It is not for nothing that St. John is depicted with the traditional eagle sitting there at his feet. Each of the four Evangelists, you know, has his own symbol, expressive of his character. St. Luke's symbol, for example, is the ox.¹ But St. John's symbol is the eagle because his Gospel has long been credited by Christians as somehow being the most high-flying, lofty, and elevated of the Gospels. Like an eagle soaring high above the forest, with the largest perspective on things, so John's story of the Gospel is the most abstract and elevated of the stories. And so it is that St. John asks us to lift up our eyes from the manger and the Babe and to rejoice in the high doctrine of the Holy Incarnation of God: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

There are many magnificent themes in this first chapter of St. John. This newborn Saviour, for example, is Life. As John says:

In him was life...

And this newborn Saviour is Light:

... and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:4-5).

But this Christmas morning let me linger with just this one theme: The Babe of Bethlehem is the "Word made flesh." There are two claims here: God

¹ One of our members recently kidded me that if I were a saint, my symbol should be the coffee pot: St. Gregory of the Coffee Pot.

has a Word, and that Word becomes a human being. Let's take these two in order.

First, God has a Word. I should hope so! A god that has no word would be a pretty poor god and of little comfort to a needy world. Deities that cannot speak are a heartbreak in this world, as Isaiah of old observed about the pagans and their idols:

⁶They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, and hire a goldsmith; and he maketh it a god: they fall down, yea, they worship. ⁷They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place shall he not remove: yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble.(Isa 46:6-7, KJV)

But against these silent idols and along with the whole Bible, St. John declares that our God has a Word. He is not a stick, nor a stone, but a God who speaks.

And here is a very fine thing to ponder about God's Word: It is an adequate word! It is true to his heart and it is true to us.

Let me try to explain what I mean by the word "adequate" by referring to veterans of the Second World War. There are not many of them left, you know. But I have been around a while, and I have had a chance to talk with some of them. You might have noticed the same thing I have noticed: Many World War II veterans are reluctant to talk about their experiences in that war. It is not that they doubt that other folks would be interested in what they have to say, and it is not that they had no experiences worth telling. It is simply that they cannot find *adequate* words. If they were poets, or songwriters, or novelists, maybe they could find the right words to try to tell their story, but as it is, their words fall short of what is on their heart, and so they quietly go about their jobs and live out their days. They are good at many things, but not quite at this: they cannot put into words all that is in their heart.

Here is the drama of Christmas. One way to think of Christmas is that at last... at long, long last

stretching back to the very beginning of things... an *adequate* Word has been spoken — adequate to the very heart of God himself.

You and I might search around for the right word to say at the right time. We are in love, let us say, yet feel keenly that our words are too poor for the emotion in our heart. But with the birth of Jesus, at last God has properly expressed himself.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God..." John writes. This Word does not fall short of God's heart. It does not fail him. It does not misrepresent him. It does not get him wrong. This Word is adequate to God's heart.

So, that is one point. There is no disharmony between the Word of God and the heart of God. We need not fear that behind the Word of God there lingers a brooding heart of God — some chaos or indifference or wrath — that will one day spring forth and contradict his Word. For his Word reveals him. His Word does not let him down.

Furthermore this Word is that it does not let *us* down either. Here I am ruling out deceit or betrayal in the Word of God. By contrast, think of Judas. He greets Jesus with a kiss:

⁴⁸Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. ⁴⁹And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him. (Matt 26:48-49, KJV)

The problem with Judas is not that his words let him down, but that his words let Jesus down. His words, sorry to say, were perfectly adequate to his heart, only his heart was a poor one at this point. So, his friendly greeting to Jesus, calling him "Master," and kissing him — these words are adequate to himself, but not to our Lord.

But not so with the Word of God. Not only is that Word true to God, but also true to us. In our God there is no deceit. What his Word says to us is true and trustworthy:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. (James 1:17, KJV)

³For what if some [some Jews] did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? ⁴God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar... (Rom 3:3-4, KJV)

Let that suffice for my first point: Our God has a Word. He is not sullen and speechless, but has a Word and that Word is adequate to his heart.

Now, let me turn to the second point — John's great theme about the Holy Incarnation of Our God: This adequate Word became a man. He became a human person like you and me. He knows what it means to rest in a mother's arms. He knows what it means to learn a craft and make a living. He knows what it means to have friends and disciples. And he knows what it means to surrender his life that others might have a chance to live.

And this is a great advance over the mere notion that God has a Word, even a very fine and adequate Word. For Words cannot love you, Words cannot die for you, and Words cannot hear your prayers.

I do not mean to underestimate the power of words. In a way, once we speak our words, they take on a life of their own and they can profoundly change reality. I mean, the marriage vow changes the world for husband and wife, and blesses their world. And a mighty speech can rally a nation, as did Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*, Sir Winston Churchill's speech *This was their finest hour*, and Martin Luther King's speech, *I have a dream*. Such words can outlive their speakers and go on changing the world in surprising ways and wonderful ways.

But none of that is as wonderful as this Word we celebrate at Christmas time, for this Word born in Bethlehem's manger loves you! He knows your life: he knows your weariness, temptation, and disappointment, and he loves you through it all. He hears your prayers and they burn within his heart, creating an unconquerable determination in him to come to your salvation. He comes to you, one by one in the Blessed Sacrament to give you encouragement for the coming week. And finally there is this: His arms extended outward to the whole world... his arms as we see them portrayed in our altar statue of our Lord ... his arms will one day embrace you and give you a heartfelt hug. This Word born in Bethlehem has become flesh, and in doing so, changes everything for the better.

To this Incarnate Word be the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.