

“The Word from the beginning” John 1:1-14

“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. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to 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. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Yesterday on Christmas Eve the whole world celebrated and reflected on the birth of Jesus from Nazareth. A child was born, a man just like us. In a certain place, in a certain time, to this couple of very ordinary people.

Jesus from Nazareth. The Son of Man. And as the Son of Man He seems so accessible to us, so close, so much one of us, our Brother, who can relate to our struggles and joys, who can understand our challenges and longings.

But is that all? Is that enough to know this Jesus from Nazareth just as one who is like us? John the apostle says: “No!” What we can see with our own eyes and perceive with our own senses, it is not the whole story yet. There is so much more.

Yes, when Jesus walked among us, we saw Him as one of us. But His eternal, divine nature was hidden from our eyes. Not only we didn’t recognize Him for who He truly was, not only we didn’t receive Him, when He came searching for us, but we rejected Him, we crucified the very Lord of life.

Not much has changes since those days. Surely, no reasonable person can deny the historicity of Jesus from Nazareth, but still, people keep ignoring Him and rejecting Him, and if only they could, they probably would destroy Him as they keep doing it to His disciples even today.

John with this introduction to His Gospel account goes on to open our eyes, so that we could see all that our God wants to reveal to us. The Holy Spirit speaking through John thus unveils for us the divine nature of Jesus from Nazareth.

And for us it is really important to have the full picture of who Jesus was and is. Because if we don't understand who He is, we can't understand and therefore can't receive the gifts that He has brought to us.

If someone sees Jesus only as a man, surely, they can still learn a lot from Him, more than from anyone else in this world, – great wisdom, gracious attitude, and so on, for He was marvelous a teacher and wonderful an example for everyone.

But if we stop at that, it would be like receiving the life saving medicine, but thinking that the plastic bottle that contains the medicine is all that there is. Nice bottle, convenient top, pleasant to eyes and hands, but... what is the point if you don't open it and don't use its content?!

Similarly with Jesus, sure, there are good, even great things that we can see looking at the life of this man from Nazareth, but unless we can see behind the visible, unless we can see the true content, the true essence of who Jesus is, we are like fools, who may have life-saving medicine in their hands, but are not using it.

So, what does it change, if we know who Jesus truly was, if we know the divine nature of the Word, who was already in the beginning? John lists a few things that Jesus has brought to us and that He generously offers to every human being.

“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” First, He gives us new identity. That's huge. We are who we are and we can't change it. We cannot upgrade ourselves to be more than we are. It has to be done from outside. And it can only be done by someone who has the power to do that.

And this is what Jesus is able to do, and this is what He does. He makes us children of God. Children of God! Did you hear that? Did you really? We, Christians, are so used to this phrase, that it doesn't shock us anymore when we hear it. But it should!

Just to remind the magnitude of what this phrase conveys, let's replace it for a moment with another. “He gives us the right to become members of ... the royal family.” This is the new identity that He gives you. He adopts you in the royal family with all its privileges.

Except, it is not about being adopted just in a royal family. He makes you children of God, members of the Divine Family with Himself and the Father and the Holy Spirit, and with all the saints from all ages.

And as God's children then you get the privileges and the stuff that God the Father gives to His children. What is it that He gives us? John mentions a few things, and we will briefly look at three of them. He gives us life. He gives us light. And He gives us grace. What does this mean for us, what exactly does He give us?

First, life. Okay, some may say that they already have it. No, you don't. Not at all. With every day of our lives we sink deeper and deeper into the mouth of death, until the day comes when death swallows us fully. That's it. That's what we have.

But Jesus, on the other hand, the Son of God, true man and true God, He has life in Himself. True life. Never ceasing life, eternal life. When He unites you with Himself by means of His Holy Spirit, through the Word and the Sacraments, then He fills you with this life. He shares it with you, He feeds you with true life in His Holy Meal. He gives the gift of life to everyone who is willing to receive it.

Second, light. As children of God we no longer walk in darkness, now we walk in light. In true light. For we know the truth. The light of God's truth has shone on us, it has been revealed to us as God's children. He delights in teaching us.

As children of God we have this privilege to know the truth about our Father in heaven, and about our brother Jesus Christ, we know the truth about ourselves, – who we are, how precious to our God we are, why we are here, what is wrong with us and what our God has done to solve our main problem.

Now our eyes are open, the Word of God and His Holy Spirit opens them and keeps them open, God's wisdom is revealed to you. But those who reject Jesus, as the divine Word, they can't receive these divine gifts, for they come only together with the Giver, with the Eternal Word Himself, with Jesus from Nazareth.

Finally, grace. And not just grace, but "grace upon grace" as John writes it. The abundance of grace in so many ways. We receive God's grace from the Word who became flesh as from our Creator, and then also as from our Redeemer.

He didn't have to create us. None of us. Or to provide for us. Or to shower us with the gifts of His good and bountiful creation. There was nothing that compelled or compels Him to do that. Least of all our ingratitude and self-centered rebellion against Him. But He still cares for us out of His divine goodness and mercy.

But then even more, His undeserved and unconditional grace is given to us, fallen sinners, while we are still His enemies, while we still reject and despise Him. Despite of our attitude towards Him, the Word who became flesh comes to us and bestows His saving grace upon us.

He doesn't close His eyes on everything that we have done wrong, and everything that is wrong with us. Instead, He takes full responsibility for the mess that we have made and the mess that we are. He takes all of that upon Himself. In exchange He gives us freedom to live in restored relationships with God the Father, freedom to live out our true identity of God's children.

And this grace is offered to everyone, for free, as God's gift, but only those who receive the Word, who was from the beginning, as Jesus from Nazareth, can also receive the grace from the hands of the eternal Son of God.

You see, we need to know who Jesus is, who He truly is, so that we can receive Him and with Him also the treasures and blessings that He offers us. He is the same Word that was in the beginning, the same Word through whom everything was made and in whom everything still holds together.

He is Your Creator, He is your Redeemer, He has created you, given you everything and He has made you children of God, He comes to you, and when you receive Him, He gives to you His divine life, His divine light and His divine grace.

Just receive Him, the Word who was in the beginning, as this man Jesus, and all that is His, will be yours.

Amen.