

“What will you gain?” 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.”

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

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

The Son of Man. And being one of us He seems so accessible, on the same level with us, our brother, who can relate to our struggles and joys and 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 certainly has a different take. What we can see with our own eyes and perceive with our own senses, that 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. We didn't recognize Him for who He truly was. John with this introduction to His Gospel account opens our eyes so that we could see all that our God wants to reveal to us. The Holy Spirit speaking through John unveils for us the divine nature of Jesus from Nazareth. Who He truly was.

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 neither understand nor 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. He was a marvelous teacher, indeed, and a wonderful example for everyone.

But... if we stop at that, it would be like receiving 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 very essence of who Jesus is, we are like fools, who may have such life-saving medicine available, 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 everyone.

“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 a new identity. This is huge! We are who we are. We cannot upgrade ourselves to be more than we are. It can only be done by someone who has the power and authority to do that.

This is what the Son of God 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!

How can something so great happen to us! Reflect on this! Jesus makes you a child of God, a member of the Divine Family with Himself and the Father and the Holy Spirit, and with the multitudes of saints from all ages and all the corners of the world.

And as God's children then you get the privileges and the stuff that God the Father gives to His children. What does He give us? John mentions a few things, and we will briefly look at three of them. **Jesus 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, Jesus gives us life. Okay, some may say that they already have it. No, we don't. Not at all. With every day of our lives, we sink deeper and deeper in the jaws 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 true life to everyone who is willing to receive it. Just be willing...

Second, Jesus gives us 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. 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 about it. Now our eyes are open, the Word of God and His Holy Spirit opens them and keeps them open, and 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. Just receive Him!

Finally, Jesus gives us grace. And not just grace, but “**grace upon grace**” as John writes. 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. He didn't have to give you life, or to provide for us. Or to shower us with the gifts of His bountiful creation. There is nothing that compels Him to care for us, ungrateful bunch. He cares for us out of His divine goodness and mercy.

But then even more, His undeserved grace is given to us, fallen sinners, while we are still His enemies, while we still reject and despise Him. Despite 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 as God's children. Joyful, hopeful, abundant freedom.

And this grace of God is offered to everyone, for free, without conditions, as God's generous gift. But only those, who receive Jesus both as the divine Word who was from the beginning and as a man Jesus from Nazareth, can also receive this grace.

You see, we need to know who Jesus 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 and He is your Redeemer, He has created you, body and soul, and given you everything that you need for this life. 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 and all that is His... is yours.

Amen.