**The Festival of Christmas,**

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 *Concordia Lutheran Mission*,

 Terrebonne, OR.

**“God Dwells Graciously with Men in the Incarnation and He Dwells Graciously with Men in the Gospel.**”

And the Word was made 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.

**St. John 1:14**.

**Introduction**.

 God always dwells graciously with men. For everything men have are gifts of God. After the fall of sin, however, God dwells especially graciously through the Gospel. Even though men forfeit everything from God through sin, God nevertheless continues to dwell graciously with men through the Passion of Christ.

 When God came to dwell with men in the flesh, He came to do so graciously. He didn’t come to condemn men, which they rightly deserved, but graciously. That gracious dwelling is the Passion of Christ whereupon God Himself took upon the burden of the sins of men in order to Atone for them and save men.

 God also continues to dwell graciously with men in His Word and Sacraments, the Gospel. Through the Gospel God dwells with us to forgive sins, save, and give life everlasting.

 God dwells graciously with men in the Incarnation and He dwells graciously with men in the Gospel to save and give the gift of life everlasting.

**I. God Dwells Graciously with Men in the Passion of Christ to Atone for the Sins of Men and Save.**

**A. Sin puts men at odds with God’s gracious nature.**

 Grace in one sense simply means gift.[[1]](#footnote-1)1 Everything we have is a gift of God. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

For in him [God] we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.[[2]](#footnote-2)2

 Man, however, put himself at odds with God’s grace and forfeited everything, including his life. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned ....[[3]](#footnote-3)3

**B. God’s dwells graciously with men in the Passion of Christ.**

In spite of man’s sin, God continued to dwell graciously with men but in a new way that would deliver men from their sins. The Apostle St. John writes:

And the Word was made 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.[[4]](#footnote-4)4

 The Word is God Himself[[5]](#footnote-5)5 and became Incarnate (became man). God became man in order to dwell graciously not with perfect men but with sinners who had forfeited everything by rejecting God’s gift of life and creation. The Apostle St. John writes that God Incarnate is “full of grace and truth”, not wrath and condemnation.

 God’s Gift to sinners is to dwell graciously amongst men by living a pure and holy life for them. Men suffer from a sinful conception and birth. Christ enjoyed a pure conception and birth in order to give it to men that they again might have life. The Apostle St. Matthew writes of Christ’s pure birth:

But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou so of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.[[6]](#footnote-6)6

The Apostle St. Paul writes that Christ was born in order to live a holy life for all men under the law[[7]](#footnote-7)7:

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.[[8]](#footnote-8)8

Luther writes of Christ’s Pure Birth for us unto life everlasting:

Christ is born for you and ... his birth is yours, and come to pass for your benefit. For the Gospel teaches that Christ was born for our sake and that he did everything and suffered all things for our sake ... . Christ has a pure, innocent, holy birth. Man has an impure, sinful, damned birth, as David says in Psalm 51[:5] ... . There is simply no remedy for this except through the pure birth of Christ. ... Christ willed to be born so that we might be born in different manner ... . In this manner Christ takes to himself our birth and absorbs it in his birth; he present us with his birth so that we become pure and new in it, as if it were our own, so that every Christian might rejoice in this birth of Christ and glory in it no less than if he, too, like Christ, had been born bodily of Mary.[[9]](#footnote-9)9

 Finally, Christ died on the Cross in order Absolve us of all unrighteousness, leaving only His God-Pleasing righteousness for us in its place. The Apostle St. John writes:

And he [Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world.1[[10]](#footnote-10)0

**II. God Dwells Graciously Amongst Men in His Word and Sacraments, i.e., the Gospel**1[[11]](#footnote-11)1**, to Forgive Sins and Save.**

**A. God dwells graciously with men in His Word and Sacraments, i.e., the Gospel, to forgive sins and save.**

God continues to make His Advent (Coming) to us daily in His Word and Sacraments1[[12]](#footnote-12)2 in order to dwell graciously with men to forgive sins and save.1[[13]](#footnote-13)3 Jesus says:

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.1[[14]](#footnote-14)4

We gather around Christ’s Name in Holy Baptism and there He1[[15]](#footnote-15)5 forgives our sins.1[[16]](#footnote-16)6 We gather around Christ’s Name in the Holy Communion and there He forgives our sins.1[[17]](#footnote-17)7 We gather around Christ’s Name to preach the Gospel and there He forgives our sins.1[[18]](#footnote-18)8

Because God dwells graciously in the Gospel to forgive our sins, He saves by this gracious dwelling with us. The Apostle St. Peter writes:

The like figure whereunto *even* baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience1[[19]](#footnote-19)9 toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ ... .2[[20]](#footnote-20)0

**B. God’s Gracious Dwelling men in the Gospel gives the gift of life everlasting.**

 God’s gracious dwelling with men in the Gospel restores to men the gift of life everlasting. The Apostle St. Paul writes of the Gift of the Gospel restoring God’s gift of life to men fallen in sin:

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit, Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.2[[21]](#footnote-21)1

**Conclusion**.

 The Greatest Gift of Christmas is the Gospel.2[[22]](#footnote-22)2

 Men forfeited God’s grace or gift of life and all the blessings of His creation when through sin. God, however, still graciously (givingly) dwells with men through His Incarnation wherein He Atoned for the sins of men to deliver them into life everlasting.

 Finally, God continues to dwell graciously with men in the Gospel where he daily forgives sins for Christ’s Sake, saves, and gives unto men life everlasting and the resurrection of the body when He returns again in glory on the Last Day.

 **Amen.**

1. 1“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” **Ephesians 2:8-10**. The Grace referred to here is God’s Word and Sacraments, i.e., “For by Word and Sacrament are ye saved through faith”, because God’s Grace is His Word and Sacraments. “To be saved by the Word and the Sacraments means, according to Scripture, to be saved by grace for Christ’s sake, without works.” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2**Acts 17:28**, amplification in brackets added. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 3**Romans 5:12**. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 4**St. John 1:14**. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 5“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” **St. John 1:1**. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 6**St. Matthew 1:20-21**. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 8**Galatians 4:4-6**. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 9Marin Luther*, Luther’s Works*, Vol. 52, pp. 14, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 10**I John 2:2**. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 11God’s Word and Sacraments are the Gospel. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 12“Lossius, the friend of Melancthon and the editor of a famous Reformation cantionale, speaks of a threefold advent – his coming in the flesh, his return to judgment, and his daily coming in the ministrations of the Word and Sacraments.” The Rev. Dr. Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 466, underscore added.

 “**Lossius**, **Lukas**, 1508 (or 1510)-82; assisted in introducing the Reformation to Luenburg; later rector of school in Lueneburg ... .” *Concordia Cyclopedia*, eds. Ludwig Fuerbringer, Theodore Engelder, P. E. Kretzmann, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1927, s. v. “**Lossius**, **Lukas**”. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 13“Christ came into the flesh to be with us in Baptism and at the Holy Supper. Every Spirit who is at pains to teach that Christ does everything through the sacraments of God, is glad to hear about Christ, and gives thanks. For he understand that Christ is his and that He came in the flesh. Therefore this has been stated emphatically. Behold, this is the test of a spirit, whether he is of God or of the devil.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 30, pp. 285, 286, emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. 14**St. Matthew 18:20.** [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. 15“That such merits and benefits of Christ shall be presented, offered, and distributed to us through His Word and Sacraments.” *The Formula of Concord*, **Article XI**. **Of God’s Eternal Election.**16, *Triglotta*, p. 1069. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. 16“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call.” **Acts 2:38-39**. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. 17“For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” **St. Matthew 26:28**. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. 18“Then said Jesus to them again, Peace *be* unto you: as *my* Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on *them* and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost; Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; *and* whose soever *sins* ye retain, they are retained*.*” **St. John 20:21-23**. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. 19“The Greek word for ‘answer’, as is universally accepted, has in forensic language become a technical term for ‘agreement’. Contained in the original meaning of the word was the fact that the signing of an agreement began with the question: ‘Do you solemnly promise?’ This was eventually lost in idiomatic usage so that by this word as legal expression the Greek came to think only of the legal stipulation itself. And this meaning fits admirably in our passage, the only one in which the word is found in the New Testament. Baptism is the stipulation, or, to say with Luther, ‘the covenant of a good conscience’ in relation to or with God. Baptism cleanses the conscience from sin and its guilt, generates a good conscience which looks up to God joyfully and confidently, standing in union and communion with God. On the basis of this passage from Peter we commonly speak of the baptismal covenant. Cremer’s explanation keys in with this: ‘The claim, the title, which a good conscience has to God.’” The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Lectures on the First Epistle of St. Peter*, tr. Erwin W. Koehlinger, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, no date, pp. 165, 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. 20**I Peter 3:21**. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. 21**Titus 3:4-7**. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. 22“Scripture constantly reminds us that our deliverance from the guilt of sin through the one sacrifice of Christ must be kept in the foreground. It is the cause and fountainhead of all other blessings. Because our guilt is wiped out before God, therefore we are also redeemed from death, etc.” Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 344. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)