



THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

CHRISTMAS DAY

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

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Collect of the Day:

Almighty God, grant that the birth of Your only-begotten Son in the flesh may set us free from the bondage of sin; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Introit:

Psalm 98:1-4 (antiphon: Isaiah 9:6)
— *For unto us a Child is born*

Psalms:

Psalm 2 (antiphon: v. 7)
— *You are My Son; today I have begotten You*

Old Testament Reading:

Exodus 40:17-21, 34-38 — *The tabernacle and the glory of the Lord*

Gradual:

Psalm 118:26a, 27a, 23 — *Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord*

Epistle:

Titus 3:4-7 — *The Loving Kindness of God our Savior*

Verse:

Liturgical Text — *Alleluia. A holy day has dawned upon us. Come, all you nations, and worship the Lord. Alleluia.*

John 1:1-14 ESV

Author and Date:

The Holy Spirit caused His Word to be written through St. John the Evangelist around 90 AD. This is the prologue to the Gospel of John: the Nativity of Christ stating that the Word became flesh, that is, God became man.

¹ **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.** ² **He was in the beginning with God.**

- The first words of John's Gospel repeat the words of Genesis 1:1. Genesis begins with Creation; John begins with Re-creation. Both Moses and John write regarding the same moment in time: Moses focuses on the creation of man and the world; John focuses on God and eternity.
- As shown in this translation, the original Greek in verse 1 does not have a definite article before "God" (*theós* rather than *o theós*; or in English, "God" rather than "the God"). Jehovah's Witnesses claim that this demonstrates the inferiority of the Word (The New World Translation of The Holy Scriptures: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god."). The Jehovah's Witnesses false teaching denies the Holy Trinity, as is clearly revealed in Holy Scripture, and not only damages faith, but damns those who believe this falsehood (The Athanasian Creed: "Whoever desires to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic faith. Whoever does not keep it whole and undefiled will without doubt perish eternally. And the catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity..."). Romans 9:5, Titus 2:13, Romans 1:7, and Philippians 2:6, however, demonstrate that the lack of the article does not suggest inferiority of position or rank. E.C. Colwell makes known that "a definite predicate nominative has the article when it follows the verb; it does not have the article when it precedes the verb" (E.C. Colwell, "A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament," 115). Simply put, "God" in the first and second part of verse 1 show forth the equality, not inferiority, of the Word with God. John does not stress the point that God was a word, but that the Word which is mentioned was in reality God, God of God. Nevertheless, apart from this grammatical analysis, John 1:2-4 states that the Word is eternal, the instrument of God's Creation, and

the Light and the Life: These are attributes that belong to God alone. Moreover, John 1:18 clearly says the Word (Jesus, the Life, Light, and Son of God) is the only God: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” This text teaches that there was never a time when the Word was not. John 1 is a clear testimony to the revelation and mystery of the Holy Trinity.

³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

- This prologue establishes Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and confesses that those who believe have life in His name. This Gospel was written so that the reader might believe in Christ and have eternal life (John 20:31).
- The world is in darkness through captivity to sin, death, and the devil. Without Christ, there is only darkness and death. Life and Light, therefore, must come into the world since the world has none of it. Salvation comes *extra nos*, that is, not “within ourselves” but from “outside ourselves.” Salvation is external to man; it must be given from God.
- The word “life” is used 36 times in John and it refers to life in communion with God. Jesus is not only the author of life and light, He bears them. He not only bears them, He gives them. John 5:1-6:71 reveals that Jesus is the fount of life. John 9:1-10:42 reveals that Christ is the origin and light of the world.
- “Why did the Son and not the Father nor the Holy Spirit assume the flesh? . . . In the beginning all things were created through the Son. Therefore it was fitting that as the creating and shaping belong to Him, the re-creating and reshaping belong to Him (Justin, *Exp. fid.*), and that what had been corrupted in the work of God be reformed through Him. . . . For that reason we are called ‘new creatures’ in Christ (Galatians 6:15)” (Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces: On Christ*, 98).

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

- John was the Forerunner for Christ. He was not named after his father, Zechariah, because God chose to name him John. In Hebrew, John means “God is gracious.” The name of John conforms to his calling.

⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

- “[Scripture] represents natural man not only as devoid of any capacity for believing the Gospel (John 6:44; 1 Corinthians 2:14), but also as always resisting the Gospel (1 Corinthians 2:14). And then, on the positive side, Scripture declares faith to be the produce of the divine grace and almighty power (Philippians 1:29; Ephesians 1:19-20), a new birth of God (John 1:12-13), a resurrection from the dead (Colossians 2:12), and puts the creation of faith on a line with the creation of light (2 Corinthians 4:6). Not for a moment does Scripture leave it in doubt that conversion is effected solely by God. The denial of this truth rests on arguments that are derived from sources other than Holy Scripture” (Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics II*, 456).
- “[F]aith itself is credited for righteousness. Faith is that thing God declares to be righteousness. . . . Christ’s name is received only by faith. Therefore, we are saved by confidence in Christ’s name, and not by confidence in our works. For ‘the name’ here (Acts 4:11-12) means the cause that is mentioned, because of which salvation is gained. To call upon Christ’s name is to trust in His name as the cause, or price, because of which we are saved” (*Apology of the Augsburg Confessions*, IV:89, 99).

¹⁴ 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.

- “We should not deny [Christ’s] true humanity because of our confession of His deity, nor should we deny His true divinity because of our confession of His humanity” (Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces: On Christ*, 34).
- “So now, since the incarnation, there belongs to the entire person of Christ personally not only His divine nature, but also His received human nature. So without His divinity, and also without His humanity, the person of Christ or the incarnate Son of God is not complete. We mean the Son of God who has received flesh and become man. Therefore, Christ is not two distinct persons, but one single person, even though two distinct natures are found in Him, unconfused in their natural essence and properties” (*Formula, Solid Declaration: Article VIII. The Person of Christ*, 11).

