

Christmas, 1988

Text: John 1: 1-14.

Martin Luther in the Small Catechism gives the impression that the Father presides over the creation, the Son works the redemption and the Holy Spirit is in charge of sanctification, and that in an exclusive way. But really all three persons of the Blessed Trinity are involved in creation, redemption and sanctification. In the Gospel of John, the story of Jesus begins with the creation.

John takes the birth of Christ back to the creation. John takes the birth into the time of creation. And in doing that he shows that things are turned back to where we started.

Time to God is not our time. God somehow still contains all time before his eyes. Creation Redemption Salvation are all before his eyes at the same time - where we know so little of the past, are conscious only a limited way about our present, and do not know what the future will bring. We are not God.

John therefore turns us back to creation. He is calling this Babe - the Word, the personified Word of God. "Thank you, God, that you gave me a body for sacrifice..." (Hebrews 10.v.5) and the Son looks to Mary and becomes a little baby, receiving a body by her. But this is the Son who was with the Father even before the world began, and is come to bring renewal in the world. To make all things new. When are they new? When they have just been created.

Children receive toys, which at least in our home get banged up and broken very fast. They are new only when they have just been manufactured. Our world was new when it had just been created.

Starting with the creation, John speaks of life, light, overcoming darkness, John, Jesus' forerunner, and the nativity of the children of God - and the Word becoming flesh through Mary.

In this Word is the creation of life and light and the children of life and light, who are going to overcome the children of death and darkness. Or better said, death and darkness will be overcome in the children of life and light.

And so you need a new paradise story that we will enter once more. It needs to be a second paradise to follow the new creation represented by the birth of Christ, who is the new Adam and the new Eve, who is the new creation. And instead of a Fall, you see the Ascent. Now instead of disobedience, you see obedience unto death. Instead of original sin, you see primal goodness from God. And what we must notice is that Adam and Eve fell by the tree of knowledge, but Jesus was lifted up on the tree of the cross.

Who wants to be raised up this way? Who wants the ascent of humankind and glory, when John is speaking of being nailed to a cross and being lifted up a sacrifice for our sins? But you have to see that this was glory. One account of Jesus' ascent to the Mount of Olives to the Garden of Gethsemane speaks not only

of his singing a hymn, but also dancing and rejoicing that he will be our sacrifice. (Joseph Campbell in conversation with Bill Moyers on Public Television) Thank God he also sweat drops of blood and wept tears so I too can identify with him. But suffering for the Kingdom is to be counted joy, and let us continue rejoicing because of it.

When Christ comes he shows us the way of salvation. Salvation takes us out of the world of sin and back to paradise, where we find the gates of paradise open once more, and Christ offering us fruit from the tree of life - because no longer is it forbidden, because in the death of Christ we too have already died. And when we take and eat in Christ, we find that the tree of life gives us food for eternal life around the table where the sons and daughters of God banquet together.

When we speak of returning to our origins - and finding this world back at its creation - it certainly flies in the face of so much reality. There's been so much water over the dam. Even in this season we hear of the catastrophic earthquake in Armenia and of the bombed Pan American flight number 103, and there are more than enough wars and other bloodshed shocking us every day.

It's hard to speak of paradise again. It's hard to believe that Christ has taken us out of the nose dive of our Fall, and righted us, and is lifting us up in the Ascent of humankind. It is hard to think God through Christ could do the creation all over again and make all things new.

But what do you think we sing all the Christmas carols about? What do you think we celebrate when we share gifts? Why do you think we decorate our houses and let all the colored lights dance to the delight of all who pass by and see our homes?

There is no program that will bring back paradise. There is no war to end wars. There is no revolution that could give us what God has already given us. But we can accept the one in whom God visited us. We can make present again the ministry of the one who ministered back in Galilee. We can allow God's holy grace to radiate back into this world through the Holy Nativity taking place in our own dear hearts.

And then what God can do in the twinkling of an eye will dumbfound us. The crooked will be straight, the high low and the darkness light - and all flesh will see the Salvation of our God.

God has a real film-projector. It does not project film on a screen, but ourselves and this world into our very existence. And God can turn the whole thing into reverse - so that suddenly we find ourselves at our beginning in the Paradise of new life and new love, caught up in the whole surprise of life beginning all over again for the redemption. Amen.

From the German Christmas Hymn:
"Lobt Gott, ihr Christen alle gleich"
(verse 6)

"Heut schleusst er wieder auf die Tuer
zum schoenen Paradeis:
Der Cherub steht nicht mehr dafuer,
Gott sei Lob, Ehr und Preis!"

Close translation:

Today God unlocks the gates
of Paradise once more.
The cherubim no longer stand before them
To God be Glory, Honor and Praise!

Freer translation:

The gates he flings back open today
of beauteous Paradise:
The cherubim are gone away,
Glory to God let praises rise
For God's heavenly new surprise!

Written on Christmas morning Sunday, December 25th, 1988
Pastor Peter Krey

