

The Nativity of Our Lord, Christmas Day

THE NEW WAY OF JESUS' GRACE AND TRUTH

John 1:1-14

The Nativity of Our Lord, Christmas Day Analysis by Timothy Hoyer

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

5The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. 6There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. 14And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

DIAGNOSIS: Death Is Natural

Step 1: External Problem : *Being Is Not Enough*

John begins with statements, not of fact, but of faith. John believes Jesus, the Word, was God because he had seen Jesus risen from the dead. Therefore, Jesus not only made all things come into being (v. 3), but what has come into being now, because of Jesus' resurrection, is life (v. 4). This life gave the gift of light to all people: "God is light" (1 John 1:5). Jesus is the way to see God's love. John then declares that "being" is not enough: To live, work, do a good job, do everything one can to have fun, to be entertained, to raise a good family, to do what you want, and then die, is not all there is. It is not life. Life is not random. It is not a time of self-service. And though we look to many things to make our life good, something valued by ourselves and admired by others, it is not enough. We are made by God.

Step 2: Internal Problem : *God Is Not Worth Trusting*

But we don't know the God who made us. For without the light that Jesus gives to all people to know God through him, we only have being, that is, existence. We do not even know that we are without God. We are in the dark about God. People may talk of God as they do in the United States and say, "God bless America," or "In God we trust," but that god is used to give ourselves importance and value and approval and confirmation that we are right. That is, by some standard, we are evaluated as having accomplished what that standard demands. Call the standard justice. Call the standard righteousness. Call the standard fairness. But it is a standard that measures. That standard darkens our minds. We think that God has a standard of right and wrong. God is held to the standard that it is right to give all people their fun, their families, their job, and their health. If God does not do that, as when a mother dies at the age of fifty, God is seen as the one who caused or allowed death

to happen. God is seen as not worth trusting.

Step 3: Eternal Problem : *We Are Left With Nothing*

When God is not trusted, then we have no one to deliver us from the randomness of life's accidents, violence, greed, pain, sickness, war and death. When our lives are hurt, the only way we know to deal with that hurt is to describe what happened as if that is all there is. We say things like, "Life isn't fair," "These things happen," "Bad things [that is, sh-] happens." Death is described the same way: Death is just the way life works; death is natural. But such descriptions cannot do anything for the fifty year old mother who is dying and who experiences that death is nothing but darkness and emptiness. Martin Luther had the same fear of annihilation. But when we do not trust God-when we do not have God to save us-then we are left with nothing. For some, that is just the way it is and they are fine with it. They don't think they need to be saved from death, and they don't know to be concerned that death is God's sentence against us.

PROGNOSIS: Life with God Is Given by Jesus

Step 4: Eternal Solution : *Jesus Comes with Grace and Truth*

But the Word became flesh. Merry Christmas! John the Baptist, the one who testified to the light, pointed to Jesus and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus came to us with grace and truth (v. 14). Jesus with his grace and truth is God's new way to deal with our not trusting God. There was "Moses" who gave us God's law as a way to deal with our not trusting God (John 1:17). The law is the standard that says we are supposed to trust God and that we don't. But the law can't change hearts that do not trust God. So Jesus' grace is to die for us. Jesus' grace is to rise from death, offering us his truth-himself-as the new way to know God and all of life and all of creation with changed hearts. God

is not content being the one who causes or allows things to happen; God is the one who overcomes death, our death. God now offers us God's care, God's mercy, and God as our Father who makes us God's children instead of creatures of nature who live and die.

Step 5: Internal Solution : *Jesus Gives Us Trust in Him*

Even more, Jesus gives us the power that makes us children of God ("he gave power to become children of God," v. 12). Jesus offers us his love, he offers us his kindness, and he offers us himself as company. He sits down beside us and we are suddenly with him. He feeds us with bread and wine, and we feast together. By such gifts Jesus makes us children of God, giving us the power which he called the Advocate, the Holy Spirit. We trust Jesus because he is with us in mercy, in kindness, in his being subject to the very same bad events of life and the very same death we all endure. But he has been raised from the dead. And so we place our trust in Jesus rather than our ability to have fun, family, health, or work.

Step 6: External Solution : *Jesus' Love Is More than Enough*

In Jesus we see that just being is not enough because now we see there is more! He gives us life and life abundantly! Life is not standards and judgment, or trying our best and having fun and getting what we can. Life is Jesus and his mercy. Life without Jesus may not be fair, but with Jesus life means being loved by him, by his Father, and being filled with his love for the sake of others. We give love, not just platitudes like, "Life isn't fair." We give hope for life with God, not just the resignation that everyone has to die some time. We do not settle with enduring, but we help one another to protect life, to preserve life, to give others the goodness that God created-food and shelter and medicine and education. By our kindness done by faith in Jesus, the darkness of the world has all these people and all their acts of love shining in the darkness. And the

darkness will not overcome it. Jesus lives.