

Last night was the appetizer. Today is the full meal. For this morning the Savior, who was lying upon the wood of the manger, is now placed upon the wood of the altar for you. And He is placed upon this wood within the rich meal of the Sacrament because He hung upon the wood of the cross.

Christmas is actually the season of Pre-Lent. Lent is months away. But throughout the Christmas story we are reminded that the Baby born of Mary was destined to die on a cross. From the cloths that were swaddling Him in His manger and which would be draped over Him in His death, to the myrrh that was gifted to him by wise men and which would adorn His body in the tomb, to the spears of Herod's soldiers which pierced the male babies in Bethlehem and that would pierce His side on the cross, the Christmas story points us, yes it thrusts our eyes forward to see the true reason why the Word became flesh. For, very simply put, the Word became flesh so that He could suffer, die, be buried, and rise again for you.

Within this one verse we have both Christmas and Good Friday: "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory.*" The Word became flesh within Mary's womb, but when do we see His glory? Is it when the angel appeared to the shepherds and the glory of the Lord shone around them? Is it when He began to teach and do mighty miracles? Is it when He was transfigured on the high mountain?

All of these do indeed reveal His glory, yet only as appetizers. For it is only His bloody crucifixion that shows us His glory in full measure. God truly shows Himself to be God when He exchanges places with His sinful creatures.

No false god would do such a thing. All the gods and idols that men create, and worship, exalt themselves over their subjects. This is their glory. To be and remain above those who bow down to them. Indeed, the word glory means to be exalted.

And this is how the Word who became flesh, Jesus Christ the Son of God, exalts Himself – by being raised up on a cross to suffer what you and I deserve for our sins, to die the death that we should die.

It is impossible to separate Christmas from Good Friday. And yet so many do. They, along with the world around us, focus only upon the joy and happiness, the enchantment and family togetherness which Christmas can bring. Who wants to think about sadness and sorrow at a time like this? Who wants to hear a Good Friday message on Christmas morning?

Yet without Good Friday, Christmas is meaningless. Without the cross, there is no substance to the Christmas story. But because the Word who became flesh was nailed to a cross, you do have joy now at Christmas and always. Because the glory of your God was to take your sins to His cross and suffer and die for you there, you are able to be enchanted by Christmas and enjoy your family togetherness.

And if your family is awaiting you in heaven, your sadness at this time of the year cannot erase your joy. And it's because Christmas is joined together forever with Good Friday and Easter.

Christmas spirit, whatever that is, comes and goes. But for you, the hope that Jesus' death and resurrection gives, is with you always just as He is. We decorate our homes once each year. But in your baptism you are decorated with the sign of the cross year round. We enjoy being with family at this time of the year. But because of Good Friday and Easter you will be with your family forever in heaven.

Do not become upset over those who take Christ out of Christmas. The Word became flesh no matter what they say or how they celebrate in this season. And rejoice that the glory of the Christ born this day is in what He suffered for you.

As you come up to this manger today, He exalts Himself by giving you His very body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. Maybe it has been since last Christmas since you have approached His altar. He is not here with judgment but with grace for you. He is here out of mercy. He forgives you, my sinful friend. All of you are forgiven.

You believe that the Word became flesh. You believe in Christmas. Now behold and believe His glory that He who gave Himself up for you, here on the manger of His altar gives Himself to you. Amen.