

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Heavenly Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

[In the Beginning]

Brothers and sisters, Merry Christmas!

Christmas continues!

Yes, “continues,” because Christmas is not just a “Day,”

Nor a “Day and an Eve,” but a whole season—twelve days long!

It began Christmas Day and ends at Epiphany

(when we recall the Magi coming to worship the newborn King of Creation.)

That’s quite a bit different from how our American culture tends to think of Christmas.

If the culture acknowledges twelve days of Christmas at all,

It’s in the run-up to the holiday—in the twelve days *before* Christmas!

The point is: the world sees Christmas Day as the *end* rather than the *beginning*!

The world gets it backwards!

[Light was the beginning]

This should not be a surprise.

We human beings have been getting things backward since shortly after the universe was made.

Take the first book of the bible, Genesis.

It begins with three famous words:

In the beginning...

(Genesis 1)

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth *by his Word*,

He merely *said* “Let there be light!” And there was light.

All things came into existence through the power of God’s Word:

Light, oceans, plants, birds and fish, animals...

And human beings were the capstone of His creation.

Beings with a rational mind that could care for the rest of His creation.

Who would bear His light to the world.

That was *how things were supposed to be*.

While God’s creation is constant and ongoing even today,

the making of humanity was the “*end*” of God’s original act of creation.

[Darkness became the end]

It was *how things were supposed to be*.

But when our first parents plunged Creation into sin,

What followed was darkness.

(Genesis 2)

The darkness of pain and suffering.
The darkness of disease to bodies that bear God's image.
The darkness of isolation—from God and from each other.
The darkness of temptation.
The darkness of death.

We all know what that darkness is like. Especially this past COVID year.
With the recent announcement of vaccines,
 many have hope that we are reaching the beginning of the end of the pandemic—
 or in the least, the end of the beginning.
And, oh, the hope that brings!
A chance at a return to *how things are supposed to be*.
The return of parties, embraces, handshakes!
 Of being together, with God's people.
Experts are cautious, but reasonably certain that the world may have turned a corner.
Time will shine a light on things—but for now, no one knows what's in the darkness ahead of us.

Darkness is not *how things are supposed to be*.
In the beginning... God said, "Let there be Light."

[The Beginning has become the End]

We, standing in darkness, need a Light to guide us.
And it has come.
God has given us a new Beginning.

It is no coincidence that when the Apostle John set out to tell his Gospel,
he started it with the same three words Genesis did:

In the beginning...

(John 1)

With those three little words, John tells us that Creation has started over.
God is doing a new thing!

The world went backward into darkness,
So God has stretched out his hand and gone backward to redeem it!
 to fix what was broken,
 to lighten the darkness,
 to give us hope.

John writes:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through Him,

and without Him was not any thing made that was made.

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it!

(John 1:1-5)

Brothers and sisters, our darkness has not overcome God, who is *The Beginning*.
Our darkness *cannot* overcome God, who is *The Beginning*.
Our darkness *will not* overcome God, who is *The Beginning*,
Because God who is *The Beginning*, has also become *The End*.

The Word—the same Word that spoke Creation into existence—
[has become] *flesh and dwelt among us...*

God's Word is our Lord Jesus Christ,
who in these end times was made a man among men,
that he might join the end to the beginning:
that is, join man to God.

(St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book IV, Ch. 20)

God became Man in the person of Jesus Christ.
After all, that is what Immanuel means: “God with us.”
We humans, “the end of creation,”
no longer have an “end” that looks like death.
Our old “end” that we had after the Fall is gone.
It has been replaced with His “end,” which goes on and on and on...
because His end is the beginning.

In the beginning...
In *your* new beginning, that is, Jesus washed your sins away from you forever.
He conquered sin, death and the devil for you in the waters of Holy Baptism.
He took you out of your darkness and bound you to Himself forever.
You became His child.

This is the glorious victory of Christmas:
God's own Son was born as a human child that we might also become Children of God.
Because we weren't Children of God.
Creatures of God? Yes—the crowning of achievement of his creation!
Children of God? No; we were People in Darkness.

But now, as the prophet Isaiah foretold,
“*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;*
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.”
(Isaiah 9:2)

John saw these things happen. He knew Jesus personally. He picks up where Isaiah left off:
“*To all who receive Him, who believed in His name,*
He gave the right to become children of God.”
(John 1:12-13)

Even though we continually return to the darkness,
Jesus continues pursuing you, calling you to remember your baptism.
Calling you to be His child.

[The End is near]

We know how God created all things by His mere word.

We know how God began His work of re-creating all things at that first Christmas.

Now that creative Word continues to create—through you!

When John says that we “have the power to become children of God,”
he means that we get to *live* as Children of God.

You need not walk in darkness anymore—

Light was at the beginning, and it’s now been joined to the end.

Light is both behind you and ahead of you!

More than that, in Baptism, *The Light* has taken up residence within you.

You’ve seen that streetcorner preacher with the sign, “The end is near!”

Well, in a sense he’s right: The “end” is here!

Since the beginning has become the end and the end the beginning,
that means the “now” has become important.

Now, more than ever, it is important to love our neighbors.

It’s true in another sense as well.

The End really is near.

For the past few weeks of Advent, we have prayed “Come, Lord Jesus.”

His return could come in years, a week, tomorrow, or a minute from now.

What a wonderful day that will be for we who are baptized and trust in His Word!

This, the ____ day of Christmas,

let your worship of Him *today* change the way you live your life *tomorrow*,

so that you who have received Him and been given the right to become children of God
may *live* as children of God in the world.

Amen.

**Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among the people. Amen! (Psalm 96:3)**
