

“Christmas is **Our** Birthday” (John 1:1-14)
For Your Life in Christ on the High Feast of the Nativity of Our
Lord, December 25th 2011
Saint Paul’s Lutheran Church of Irvine, CA (LC–MS)
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Have you wished Jesus a happy birthday? My field work congregation, Messiah Lutheran Church, literally threw Jesus a birthday party earlier this month. We actually sang, “Happy Birthday dear Jesus.” We had cake, we had a punch... It was a legit birthday party.

If Christmas is Jesus’s birthday though, something’s off. Since we get presents, it feels more like it’s **our** birthday. But you know, the presents really do show whose birthday it is. On the deepest level, Christmas is humanity’s birthday. Jesus’s birth gives us a re-birth (LSB 380:3).

On your birthday, you celebrate the day you received life, conception aside. You celebrate the day you were born into a family. John 1 does not say that **Jesus** gained life or a family on Christmas. Rather, it says that **we** received life on Christmas. We gained the right to become members of a family. St. John says that Jesus “was the source of life, and that life was the light for humanity” (John 1:4). He goes on to say that Jesus “gave the right to become God’s children to everyone who believed in him” (John 1: 12). We get presents: new life and a new family. Christmas is **our** birthday.

John, however, doesn’t say that he gave this right to everyone, but “to everyone who believed in him.” According to St. John, to believe in Jesus means to believe in him as God’s Word,

the one who reveals God. But this title doesn't mean just anybody who reveals God. God has revealed Himself "at many different times and in many different ways," as our epistle says (Hebrews 1:1). But in Jesus, God reveals Himself in a totally unique way. Jesus isn't just a prophet; He's God's Word. He's God's Son. Hebrews 1:3 says, "His Son is the reflection of God's glory and the exact likeness of God's being." In Christmas, we get to see God's glory. We get to see God exactly for who He is.

This means God has revealed Himself to you more personally than He even did to Moses. While Moses was up on the mountain with God, he asked if he could see God's glory, but God only partially granted his request. God agreed to let His glory pass in front of Moses, but Moses was only allowed to see God's glory while hiding inside the crevice of a cliff. On top of that, God would be covering Moses with His hand until He had already passed by so Moses could only catch the slightest glimpse of His back.

Try to imagine this. If a child asked their parents if they could see their Christmas presents early, and their parents said, "Sure! Go hide in the closet, and we'll cover up the crack in the door so you can't peak. We'll take your presents and walk by the closet with them, and we'll uncover the crack in the door so you can see our backs," would they really be letting their children see their presents early? No! And Moses didn't get to look at God's 'presence' either.

Although Moses didn't see God's glory, God said something very important about Himself to His little creature hiding inside

the crevice of a cliff. God said, Yahweh is “a compassionate and merciful God, patient, always faithful, and ready to forgive” (Exodus 34:6). The translation of these last two characteristics is good, but there’s a connection in the original language to our gospel this morning. The Hebrew is רַב־חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת (*rav-chesed we’emet*), which when literally translated word-for-word is *full of grace and truth*.

This phrase only occurs in one other place in the entire Bible, and that’s in our gospel for this morning, in John 1:14. Here’s this traditional Christmas verse according to the King James Version: “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” Moses never got to see God’s glory, but we have, because Jesus **is** Yahweh. We have seen the glory of Yahweh, the God who is “always faithful and ready to forgive,” because God came to **be present** with us in Jesus, and since we get God’s presence, Christmas is **our** birthday.

To have God’s presence is to have life. After Moses got the tiniest peek at God’s glory, he stayed up on the mountain with God for 40 days and 40 nights, without food or water. The human body can last about 40 days without food, but we can’t last longer than a week without water. How did Moses survive? That tiny little peek of a hint of God’s glory was potent enough to give Moses more than enough life for a full 40 days. And if hiding in a crevice as God passes by with His back to you gives you enough life for 40 days, then how much life will we have since God Himself has

entered into our humanity directly? When we believe in Jesus, we receive the **eternal** life that God injected into humanity when God's Word became one of us. We get the **present** of eternal life through God's **presence**, so Christmas is our birthday.

We believe in Jesus as God's Word, the one who reveals God's glory to us. But what does that mean that Jesus reveals God's glory? Jesus shows us God's glory in the way he's lived. Jesus shows us that God's glory isn't to bask in His majesty with bragging and narcissism. God's glory is to become a servant, to come down to our level, to put aside His majesty and become one of us. God's glory is to be faithful when we're faithless, and Jesus obeyed his Father's will to the point of death, the shameful death of a common criminal on a Roman cross (Philippians 2:6-8). And the death of this perfectly **faithful** human being, who was **ready to forgive** even the people who nailed him to that cross—his death served as the sacrifice that purifies us from sin, everything we've done wrong to disconnect us from the source of life, once and for all (Hebrews 10:12). God's glory is that when our sinful sacrifices weren't enough, He came down and provided a sacrifice Himself. God's glory is His powerful, selfless love. There isn't anything more glorious. And that's what God's Word—that's what Jesus reveals to us about God.

Believe in Jesus. Trust in and be faithful to him, the one who gives us God's glory, His powerful, selfless love that is "always faithful and ready to forgive." Live this new, eternal, and glorious life of **faithfulness** and **forgiveness** that God is creating in you.

When God the Creator joined Himself to His creation, our re-creation began. Through the birth of God's Son, humanity's rebirth has begun. We get presents: eternal life and rebirth as God's children. We get God's presence with us in Jesus. Jesus gives **you** his presents/ence, and Jesus has come to wish **you** a happy birthday. Amen.