

John 1:1-18

Christmas Day + December 25, 2017
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls
The Body of Christmas

The Word of the Lord from John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A blessed Christmas morning to all! I pray it finds you well and joyful as we celebrate the Incarnation of our Lord. I pray that this day is a respite from the darkness and cold of winter, from the busyness and hassles of life. Just in case you missed last night's Christmas Eve service, I repeat what the angel declares to you: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." A Savior – for you! That is the joy of Christmas. God grant you a faith-filled celebration and the comfort of glory in the highest and peace on earth.

All the same, all too soon December 25 will be followed by December 26. And because we tend to have high expectations for the Christmas celebration, the day after tends to be an emotionally "down" day. After the sermon-palooza of the past 24 hours, I, for one, expect to make an appearance at church tomorrow morning, stare at the computer screen for a bit, peck a few words out on the keyboard, and say, "Well, that's enough for today." I will then proceed home for a nap, at the end of which I will probably say, "Well, that's *not* enough for today."

I digress. My point is that the holiday is gone so soon and winter is only begun, which usually leads to sort of an annual grouchiness in society and the ongoing lament that we need to have more of the "Christmas spirit" throughout the year. You know what I mean by that, I trust: right around the holidays, people tend to be warmer, kinder and friendlier than usual. They might be a little bit more outgoing and sociable. They are more likely to assume the best about others and put up with their faults more readily (except, perhaps, in store parking lots). They are certainly more charitable, and perhaps looking to be more helpful to others who are in need.

That's sort of the "spirit of Christmas" we hear about, right? Against the backdrop of winter cold and darkness, ideally there's a good feeling from warmth, family, friends, charity, gifts, unexpected kindnesses and more.

We could put it another way: we could say that, for a few days or weeks, people try to behave a little better than usual.

Or we could put it this way: for a few days or weeks, people tend to obey the law of God a little bit more *actively*: instead of just trying *not* to harm others, they actually make more of an effort to *help* others.

I'm all for it. I'm all for more love, charity, kindness and following God's Word. I'm all for people helping people. In other words, I'm all for the Christmas spirit and I too want to see it extended throughout the next eleven months.

The question, of course, is how? This appears to stump a lot of people.

The answer, however, is quite easy: if you desire the Christmas spirit to extend more throughout the year, the answer is not the spirit of Christmas. The answer is the body of Christmas.

By the "body of Christmas," I do not mean what you have fashioned of yourself by all those extra calories you've consumed in various cheeses, meats, cookies, cakes, fudge and even that ghastly eggnog that some of you claim to enjoy. When I speak of the body of Christmas, I am speaking instead of the little body that is wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in the manger.

Jesus has a body! The Word has become flesh – that's the reason for the Christmas celebration, and why we call it the Festival of the *Incarnation* of Our Lord. The almighty, eternal Son of God now has a birthday and fingers and toes and all. Or to put it another way, the Son of God – who has been spirit from eternity – now also has a body and soul, just like you.

This isn't for His sake: it's for yours. It's not as if Jesus is floating around heaven from eternity, frustrated and downcast because He can't wear hoodies. He takes on a body because everybody has a body. You have a body, and your body needs help.

The human body is a fascinating thing; and the longer I remain alive, the more amazed I am that the body is so delicate and yet so sturdy, so fragile and yet so durable. The psalmist says a profound thing when he says that we are fearfully and wonderfully made; and even if your body has some significant problems, it is still sustaining life. And what that body can do! You can walk, run, see and smell, hold hands and hold babies, sing songs, make funny popping sounds with your finger and cheek, and so much more.

You have a body – a remarkable creation, and with it comes a mind. Your brain isn't just a warm lump of matter that has random electrical impulses bouncing around. You can think and form thoughts. You can come up with great ideas, invent and imagine creative things. You can set goals, make plans and write poetry if you want to. You can think of all sorts of ways to help people around you, and then you can tell your body to get busy and do them.

Between mind and body, you've also got emotions going – a whole range of feelings like happiness, affection, contentment, appreciation for beauty, awe, joy, peace and so much more.

But wait! There's more. You're a body with a mind, but you're even more than that. You're enlivened with a spirit, and – to top things off – you've got a soul. You're designed not just for interaction with other people, but with God; not just for a brief span of days in this world, but for eternity.

That's pretty impressive – you, my friends, are quite the package! And, according to original specifications, you are designed to show the spirit of Christmas to one another not just for a few weeks in December, but always and forever.

But as I've said, your body needs help – as does your mind, soul and spirit. As delicate and intricate as the body is, there is a host of things that can go wrong with it; and it's hard to be feeling the spirit of Christmas when you're suffering from arthritis, insomnia, diabetes, wounds that won't heal, COPD, cancer, skin disorders, joint pain, migraines, multiple sclerosis, anemia, the common cold, hard hearing, dimming vision ... the list of possible illnesses and injuries keeps going, so that you even have a chance of some new affliction being named after you.

That mind of yours, too ... it's not doing so well. On the one hand, there's the anxiety, worry, depression, forgetfulness, the difficulty putting thoughts and ideas together, maybe more

serious mental illness. But worse than that, you're using your mind for less than salutary things: rather than enjoy contentment, you envy others and covet more. Rather than appreciate beauty, you lust and think degrading thoughts. Rather than work out a plan to help your neighbor, you kind of enjoy feeling superior. You waste an awful lot of thought thinking rather pointless things.

All of this means that your emotional life isn't all that great: anger, disappointment, frustration, jealousy, discontent and impatience come pretty easily. They just *happen* without effort. I mean, when was the last time you said, "I've got to work harder at being impatient, and I don't think I get disappointed easily enough"?

All of this harms your spirit. Worse, it chokes and kills your soul. You might be quite the package, but with all that going on, do you still wonder why the "spirit of Christmas" is so difficult to maintain?

That's why we're gathered here to talk about the body of Christmas, the joyous truth that the Word has become flesh, that Jesus is made man.

When Jesus becomes flesh, He has a perfect body. Not "perfect" as in man's idea that goes on the front cover of a magazine next to the headline of how to sculpt a six-pack after too much Christmas cheer. His body is perfect according to God's design, meaning that it isn't corrupted by sin. There is no disease or disability about Him; and were it not necessary for your salvation, there is no need for this body to die.

When Jesus becomes flesh, He has a perfect mind. His thoughts are the thoughts of God, pure and holy. They don't shift to selfishness or figure how to justify sinful pleasure. He doesn't have the curse of sin that bends your thoughts and clogs your thinking to a standstill. He thinks on holy things: then He teaches holy things to others, and does holy things in service to them.

When Jesus becomes flesh, He knows the range of human emotion ... but His anger is always righteous, His desire is always appropriate, His peace is rooted in a clear conscience and His joy is never in the misfortune of others.

Perfectly holy in body and mind. In soul and spirit, too.

My friends, you need a body like that. If you have a body like that, then the spirit of Christmas is going to go well past December and into eternity.

You need a body like that, which is why Jesus is born. He has become flesh to restore you. Just like every healthy baby body, He grows up. He's a toddler and a twelve-year-old, then a young man, and then an adult as He goes about His public ministry. As He goes about His ministry, He heals all sorts of people of all kinds of diseases and afflictions: He restores bodies and minds. He casts out demons, liberating souls. Where the spirit has departed and the body has died, He brings the dead back to life.

He does all this on His way to the cross, toting all of your sins, iniquities and infirmities with Him. There on Calvary, He suffers the cursed death of sin that would be yours. His soul is forsaken by His Father. His body dies. He gives up His spirit – but He does so in the confidence that, on the third day, He will be raised from the dead. So He is, and so He lives.

You need a body like that. Thus, Christmas: Christ becomes flesh to be that body for you. He lives the perfect life that you cannot, then He dies the death that you can't survive. Then, risen again, He says to you, "I re-create you. I give you a perfect body, a flawless mind,

the best of emotions, a vibrant soul and a spirit that rejoices in God and all things good." He says this to you with simple words like these: "I forgive you."

It's yours, though you don't see it yet. As I said last night, you and I are like Christmas gifts that are waiting to be opened and revealed on the Last Day for who we truly are in Christ. But in Christ, the gift is already given: for His sake, God the Father sees you as perfect and holy in body, mind, soul and spirit.

This, by the way, is why sinning now is just ... dumb. For the sake of Jesus, God gives you a perfect body uncorrupted by sin, and then you go like a dog to its vomit and corrupt it again by breaking His law. He gives you a mind to think on holy things, and you get right back to anger, lust, greed and more. For now, His gift is wrapped in sinful flesh; and without repentance, that sinfulness will creep in and destroy the new you before the resurrection.

That's why you delight to live a life of repentance. Your life isn't one of dreadful fear where you think, "Maybe God will make me a new creation if I repent well enough now." Your life of repentance is one of joy, because you live knowing, "God has already made me a new creation in Christ, and that will be revealed on the Last Day. Until then, I will gladly repent of the sin that would corrupt me, for why would I want to ruin such a priceless gift?"

The gift is priceless, bought by the blood of Christ. It's bought by the blood of Christ because He has become flesh, because He is born to be your Savior. None of this happens without Christmas, because He becomes flesh to save.

The "spirit of Christmas" will always have a tough go in this world, but you have something better and far more lasting: you have the body of Christmas. You have Jesus who became flesh, who died for you and rose again, who even gives you that same body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. And if you have the body of Christ, you have the mind of Christ. You have the Holy Spirit to enliven your spirit and soul; and all of this is true because Christ the Lord is born.

A blessed and merry Christmas to you all, and God grant you His Christ and His Spirit well past this day and into eternity – for you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen