

Martin Luther on John 1:10

10. *He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world knew Him not.*

The evangelist John says next that the Word—which was from eternity, coequal with the Father in power and glory, through which all things were made, and which is also the Life and the Light of mankind—assumed human nature, was born of Mary, came into the world, dwelt among men in this temporal life, became like any other human being in all things, took the physical form of man such as yours or mine, and was cumbered with all the human frailties, as St. Paul says in Phil. 2:7. This means that He ate, drank, slept, awakened, was tired, sad, and happy. He wept and laughed, hungered, thirsted, froze, and perspired. He chatted, worked, and prayed. In brief, He required the same things for life's sustenance and preservation that any other human being does. He labored and suffered as anyone else does. He experienced both fortune and misfortune. The only difference between Him and all others was that He was sinless. Since He was also very God, He was free of sin. And yet He was the man⁵⁶ through whom the whole world was created and made. The beloved John has told us this before, and here he deliberately and purposely repeats the same words.

This is the burden of his message: "He was in the world; and although the world was made through Him, it did not know Him." His life was like the life of any other. For thirty years He dwelt with His mother, as any other may do. In His boyhood His conduct resembled that of any other youth. He was subject to His parents and obeyed their commands. At the age of twelve, to be sure, there were intimations of future greatness when He stood in the temple listening to and asking the teachers and amazing all who heard Him with His understanding and His answers (Luke 2:46–47). But this was soon forgotten. It was only Mary, so Luke tells us, who "kept all these things in her heart" (Luke 2:51). Luke also informs us that He went with His parents from Jerusalem "to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. And He increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:51–52). A few verses earlier Luke had related: "The child grew and became strong, filled with

wisdom; and the favor of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40).

There is the Creator. He is in the world. He lives among men. But He is well hidden. The world did not know Him and paid no attention to Him, especially not until His thirtieth year, when He began to preach, heal the sick, and raise the dead. And since His mother Mary, the virgin, was known to be a plain carpenter's wife, she was shown no more respect than any ordinary woman. It seems to me that the world gave abundant evidence that it did not know Him. It is quite unaware that this child, lying in His mother's lap and being washed and bathed by her like any other child, is the Light of the world, is He through whom the world was created.

We must take close note of the evangelist's words. Earlier he said (John 1:3): "All things were made through the Word." However, he does not stop there but repeats the selfsame words with intent and premeditation: "The Light was in the world, and the world was made through Him" (John 1:10). For in this way He wants to fortify and reinforce the article on which our entire faith rests, namely, that Jesus Christ is, in His nature, both very God and very man. It is as if he were to say: "The very same child that lies in the manger, takes its mother Mary's breasts, and later becomes subject to her, is the Life and the Light of man, yes, is God, the Creator of all things; for the world was made through Him."

We who are named for Christ find our chief article of faith in this truth; there is absolutely no other correct and true belief than this one, which confesses that Christ is very God and very man. This is the only saving faith. Let whoever insists on another go his way and see how he fares. If reason refuses to believe that God could become man, let her shift as she will. But we Christians believe it because God's Word says it. Nothing is impossible to faith, may reason be vexed and offended as she will. It is irrefutably true that deliverance from the devil's power, and from sin and death, as well as the gift of salvation, are dependent on the faith that Christ is true God, through whom the world was made, and also true man, born of Mary. It is exclusively this faith, and no other, regardless of what label it bears, that saves. This is attested by Scripture in Matt. 1:21: "Mary will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." And in Luke 2:11: "For to

you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” And in John 3:18: “He who believes in Him is not condemned.”

For this reason the evangelist affirms and reaffirms that Christ, our Lord, is true God. The creation of sun, moon, stars, heaven, and earth is never ascribed to an angel; for it is not an angel’s work to create the world. No, this is a divine work; creating is the domain of the true God, who is not a painting or a carving, but God in His very nature and essence.

Therefore the texts: “All things were made through the Word” and “The world was made through Him” are strong testimony and incontrovertible proof against the Arians.⁵⁷ They conceded that the Word was indeed an exalted, sublime, and divine Person, in whom two natures, the divine and the human, were joined. But they denied that the Word was God in His nature and in His essence, born of the Father in eternity; they maintained that He was merely called God. Arius acknowledged that Christ was true man, and he also confessed that He was God; but he would not admit that by nature He was God coequal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He believed that God had created Him before all creatures, also before the angels, had fashioned Him more glorious, more noble, and more sublime than all the angels, and had then called Him God. Thus reason acts smart in divine matters. But now give ear to what the evangelist says: “All things were made through the Word” and “The Light was in the world, and the world was made through Him.”

As already said, no angel or any other creature can lay claim to this title of Creator of all, but only the one true God. And now since Holy Writ assigns this title of Creator of the world, together with divine omnipotence, to Christ, our Lord, the true son of Mary, saying that the world was made through Him, it follows incontestably that He is true and essential God and Creator of all things, that, therefore, two natures, the divine and the human, are indissolubly fused in one person, namely, Christ. But, as you will hear later, He is also a child and true man.

This is the foremost article of the Christian creed. It is found only among Christians and is their greatest honor, comfort, and joy, namely: that God’s very Son assumed human nature, became flesh and blood with man, sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty in equal majesty and power as man’s

Advocate and Intercessor. Among the Jews, the Tartars and Turks, and also among the Epicureans, who fill the world today, He has no standing. In fact, they ridicule and sneer at us Christians because we are so stupid as to be persuaded that the Creator of heaven and earth became man and was crucified for us.

Let them go with their mistaken and heretical belief! They believe and teach whatever is approved by reason; blind and mad reason is capable of comprehending their belief that there is only one God. The heathen and Mohammed believe that too. But when we declare that three distinct Persons dwell inseparably in one divine essence, and that the Second Person, the Son, became incarnate, crushed the serpent’s head (Gen. 3:15), became a blessing to the human race, that is, delivered it from sin and death, then they behave very foolishly; for all of this is incomprehensible to reason. However, we Christians believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We concede that it is a sublime article of faith beyond the grasp of reason, but we know that nothing is too sublime or impossible for faith. For faith relies on God’s Word and is guided by it, not by reason. Faith is firmly convinced that the divine truth is unshakable and eternal; for God has said this, and His Word testifies to it. No, this doctrine is not derived from reason; it is derived from the Holy Spirit. And therefore, I suppose, it will always remain incomprehensible to reason without the aid of the Holy Spirit.

The world knew Him not.

But is that not surprising that the Creator was in the world, dwelt among men, and still passed unrecognized by His creatures? This was particularly true during the days before He inaugurated His ministry and performed miracles. Then there was no one who knew of Him. And yet, at that time there were several pious people in the world who knew Him—to be sure, not by reason but by power from above, by revelation from the Holy Spirit. Among these were Zacharias, Elizabeth, Simeon, the prophetess Anna, the shepherds, Mary, Joseph, and others. Elizabeth, full of the Holy Spirit, addressed Mary, the mother of the Lord, when she visited her: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the Fruit of your

womb” (Luke 1:42). And: “The babe John in my womb leaped for joy” (Luke 1:44). And Zacharias, John’s father, also inspired by the Holy Spirit, said: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people” (Luke 1:68). We also hear: “And when the shepherds saw it, they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this Child” (Luke 2:17). And Simeon exclaimed: “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation. For this Child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel” (Luke 2:29–30, 34). And Anna “gave thanks to God, and spoke of Him to all who were looking for the redemption of Israel” (Luke 2:38).

But because Christ’s actual appearance did not coincide with the image of Him which their thoughts had conjured up—He was plain and unassuming, and enjoyed no great reputation—the rulers of the people of Israel and the common mob would not acknowledge Him as the Messiah, much less accept Him. And this despite the fact that St. John had preceded Him as His herald and had testified of Him, and that He Himself appeared publicly shortly thereafter, preaching with power and performing miracles. His miracles, words, and sermons really should have identi-

fied Him; but this, too, helped very little. Nevertheless, the world nailed Him to the cross. Had they recognized His true character, this never would have happened. We, however, know Him and believe in Him. And all who wish to be saved must arrive at this same belief that Jesus Christ is God and man. All who believe in this Person are saved. And whoever is not imbued with this faith is damned, together with the disciples of superstition, pseudo spirituality, false righteousness, and idolatry. For whoever does not have this belief will never be saved.

⁵⁶ The expression *der Man* here is probably proverbial; cf. Luther’s Works, 13, p. 270, note 34.

⁵⁷ Cf. p. 19, note 17, on Augustine’s use of John 1:3 against the Arians.

Luther, M. (1999, c1957). *Vol. 22: Luther's works, vol. 22 : Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (22:73). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.