

Christmas is a time when everyone is turning. Turning their gaze to decorated trees with their colorful lights, and to the presents which lie beneath. Turning to family gatherings and to festive meals.

It is quite natural to turn to these things, and not wrong. We are not monks who hide ourselves from the world and turn to gaze upon our own navels. But we are Christians. And because God has made us His Christians, He turns our gaze to see Him who is hidden within the external shell of Christmas; to the Christ Child born for us and for all sinners.

No matter what we think of the slew of Christmas songs played on radio stations for weeks on end, a number of them do proclaim Christ. And even though the world, in general, turns only to the external shell of Christmas, we can be glad that the Christ in Christmas has not been completely removed by the world.

The reason why you turn to the Christ Child is because He turned toward you in love. "*In the beginning was the Word,*" writes St. John, "*and the Word was turned toward God, (is how the Greek reads), and the Word was God.*"

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit always have been, and always will be turned toward each other in love, for God is love. And with loving care He created you and those whom you love. But when sin entered our world, we turned away from God. And that, my fellow sinful friends, sadly is death.

But because God is both love and life, He turned toward us in this way: "*And the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.*"

Love came down at Christmas, and in the child lying in the manger we see the face of love turned toward us. Martin Luther says of this, of God becoming man, that if we truly understood it, we would die, for our hearts would burst with joy.

God became man because you and I had turned away from Him. And in turning toward us, He turned to a cross on Golgotha, and He embraced that cross. John puts this into His Christmas account: "*And the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us, and we have seen His glory.*"

There is glory at Christmas. The glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds. But there is no greater glory than that of the cross. When John writes: "*We have seen His glory,*" he is speaking of Jesus on the cross; of seeing Love itself cruelly nailed to that cross. But God's love never changes. He refused to turn away from us sinners. He refused to turn away from the cross. And so, my friends, in Jesus you have love, and life, and the forgiveness of your sins.

There is no greater gift. And this gift is yours, for it is wrapped up for you within your baptism. And it is placed here for you in the Holy Supper on the altar.

This is the gift that keeps on giving. The gift which never breaks nor wears out. The gift which we never have to return. And I'm saying this to fellow sinners who, just like me, so often, too often, turn away from God's love in Jesus to embrace sin and all its pleasures.

I know the guilt that comes to you because it comes to me, too. "Will God turn away from me because, again and again, I have turned away from Him?"

Do you see the meal on the altar? The holy meal of Jesus' body and blood? It is for you no matter how often you have turned away from Jesus.

Do you feel your head, still wet with the water of your baptism? Do you see the sign of the cross still upon your forehead and upon your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the Crucified? These will never leave you. And here, then, is God's answer to your guilt. "I will never forsake you. I forgive you. You are, and always will be, My forgiven child in your baptism, for you are baptized into Christ Himself."

Turn away from sin, therefore, on this Christmas Day, and every day. Turn to your God, for He freely forgives you for Jesus' sake. Turn to enjoy all the sights and sounds of Christmas. But above all, turn to Him who was born for you, Christ Jesus, your Lord and Savior. Amen.