

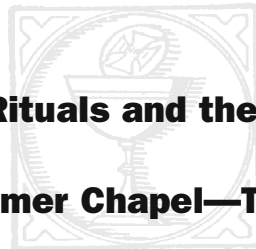
For the

# LIFE of the WORLD

June 1998. Volume Two, Number Two



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**For the LIFE of the WORLD**

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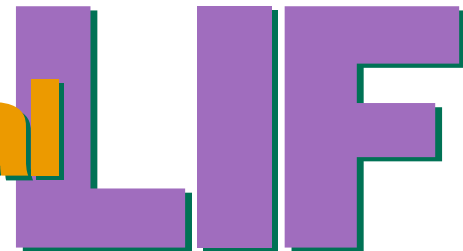
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**T**he incarnational life began when Jesus Christ broke into our world. Coming down from heaven. Jesus was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man. From the moment of His conception, the world has never been the same. Jesus the creator has entered our creation as a creature for one purpose—to make all things new.

To make things new, God the Father needed to make things right, and so He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into our world. Something had gone terribly wrong with our humanity that God had created in His image. Jesus entered our fallen world to release it from its captivity of darkness and death by spending His life in suffering and death. He came to live among us to show how God first created us to be when He created us in His own image. Jesus experienced the full tragedy of our fallen humanity, becoming sin for us, so that He

# The Incarnational



**By Rev. Dr. Arthur A. Just Jr.**

might reverse sin's curse, and make right what had gone wrong. Jesus entered into this messy world of our making in order to be faithful even unto death and restore our flesh to God's image and make us whole. The empty tomb testifies that death could not hold Him, and that His risen flesh now fills all creation with new life.

The world can never go back to the state it was before Jesus entered our cosmos in human flesh. Now and forever the world is marked by His incarnation. The very same flesh and blood Jesus who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried, on the third day rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, and

sits at the right hand of the Father continues to be present in His church after the ascension according to His divine and human natures in the preaching of the Gospel and the sacramental life of the church.

As the church journeys toward heaven, it teaches the words of the Lord, it washes at the font, and it feeds God's people at the banquet of the Lord. We believe, teach, and confess that Jesus Christ is present here in His church, the body of Christ, through the Gospel and the Sacraments, the gifts of His presence. God continues to send the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, so that we might be in communion with Him forever. When we speak of Jesus' presence, we are talking about His fleshly presence, that is, that very flesh that was crucified for us and the very flesh that broke the bonds of death on the third day.

How the eternal God made flesh to be present in His church in simple words, simple water, and simple bread and wine is part of the mystery we call the incarnational life.

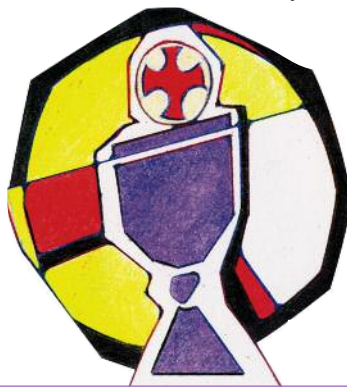
To live the incarnational life is to be united to Jesus Christ—the source of all life. This life of communion with

Jesus begins at the font where we were cleansed from our uncleanness and made whole in Him. His suffering and resurrected flesh restores our impure and unclean flesh to wholeness and wellness. The new font at Kramer Chapel reminds our community that we enter the incarnational life in baptism where we put on Christ and receive a new identity that defines our life by His life.

Life itself is a journey from birth to death. For the Christian, life is a pilgrimage from baptism to death, which is the entrance into eternity. In the waters of Holy Baptism the Christian gets death over with as he dies and is buried with Christ and is reborn to new life in Christ that never ends. In baptism, when the

Christian puts on Christ, he enters the incarnational life. But as the Christian journeys to his destination of full communion with Christ in heaven, he lives under the cross where he is continually living in Christ as he hears His Holy Word and feeds upon His Holy Food to sustain him on the journey. His pilgrimage climaxes in his physical death which is an entrance to full communion with Christ in His heavenly home. The goal of the journey is to live in Christ's presence forever and to feast at His table for eternity. The Christian pilgrimage is an incarnational life in Christ.

Our restoration to life in Christ is ongoing by our communion with Him in His holy church where He is present in His flesh to continue our health and wholeness. In His presence and the presence of a restored creation, we are fed by His flesh



**Many people today want to know how to be a Christian. What they are really asking is how to live the incarnational life. The response, "Be like Christ who lives in you!" But they will ask, "What does this mean?" The answer, "Love your enemies, be merciful and compassionate, forgive, and do works of charity."**

as He speaks to us in His Word and feeds us His holy meal of His very body and blood at the banquet He has prepared. Our life in the church is incarnational for it brings us into communion with Jesus Christ so that we might delight in Him.

This is the essence of Christ's fleshly presence in the church's life and her ministry to the world. In His body, the church, Jesus Christ bears witness to a fallen humanity that He, the Creator of all things, has come to His creation to take flesh and bring in a new creation.

"What does it mean to live an incarnational life in today's culture?" To live incarnationally is to bear witness that Jesus Christ is present in our world in His gifts through which His flesh is given to our flesh as the place and instrument of His presence. This is a matter of Christology, that is, a matter of how Jesus Christ is available to the world through the church by the Holy Spirit. As Christ's people, we stand in the midst of a broken world as the presence of Christ to that world because, as the baptized, we bear witness to our words and lives to the Christ who dwells in us. Our incarnational lives testify that Christ's presence in the world transforms the culture and makes it new. Christ is present in the world through us, and He is present for the life of the world.

Many people today want to know how to be a Christian. What they are really asking is how to live the incarnational life. The response, "Be like Christ who lives in you!" But they will ask, "What does this mean?" The answer, "Love your enemies, be merciful and compassionate, forgive, and do works of charity." But they will ask, "How is this done?" The answer, "Come to church and receive the gifts of Christ's flesh in hearing the Gospel and feasting at His banquet. And then go out into the world and be what you have become in Christ!" This is the incarnational life!

*The Rev. Dr. Arthur A. Just Jr. is a professor of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.*