

Christmas Day 2019

"The Miracle that is Christmas"

Text: John 1:1-18

*Dear Christians, one and all rejoice, with exaltation springing,
And with united heart and voice and holy rapture singing
Proclaim the wonders God hath done, how His right arm the victory won;
Right dearly it hath cost Him.*

*He spoke to His beloved Son: "'Tis time to have compassion.
Then go, bright Jewel of My crown, and bring to man salvation;
From sin and sorrow set him free, slay bitter death for him that he
may live with Thee forever.*

*The Son obeyed His Father's will, was born of virgin mother,
And God's good pleasure to fulfill, He came to be my Brother.
No garb of pomp or power He wore, a servant's form, like mine He bore,
To lead the devil captive. Amen. (TLH #387)*

May the undeserved love of God, demonstrated so beautifully in the manger in Bethlehem, be forever grafted into your heart; and may you know the peace that comes only through faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior. Amen

Dear Fellow Servants of the Baby King, we are closing in on the last days of the year 2019. Here in America everyone, with a few extraordinary exceptions, knows that it is 2019. But not just here, in Arabia it is 2019. In China, Japan, Russia, South Africa, Ethiopia, Australia, France - even in Norway they know that it is 2019. Everyone the world round recognizes this as the year 2019...AD. Anno Domini - "In the year of our Lord." And that is the point. Think about that for a moment. The world is full of differing religions, and yet the world reckons our years according to AD and BC. In other words, all time is now calculated according to the birth of that Baby in Bethlehem.

How could this be? How could one man have changed everything, as did Jesus; how could he have made such an indelible mark even on all of *secular* history? How indeed, unless he was more than just a passing blip on the world's radar. How indeed, unless he was more than just a good example. How indeed, unless he really was who he said he was.

It is the birth of *this* man, the very Son of God, that we celebrate this morning. The text on which we will base our study and celebration this morning – the beautifully poetic words of the Apostle John – tells of the

mystery, the miracle, of God made man. That text is found in John's Gospel, the First Chapter:

ESV John 1:1-18 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶ ¶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. ⁹ ¶ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. 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. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

So far the very words of God. On this Christmas Day we celebrate the giving of many gifts. The very words of our God are the single greatest gift given by God to mankind since the birth, death, and resurrection of our Savior, for it is through these words that saving faith is created and preserved. Petitioning our God for his blessing on our study, we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord, your Word is truth!**" Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, how can anyone do justice to this day? Such questions have always plagued the poor preacher as he tries to put into words just what God has done for all of us on this great occasion. Each time we fail, miserably. But then, slowly and over time, it begins to dawn on mere mortals that it will always be thus. It *must* always be thus, for how can man ever do justice to something so divinely magnificent and sublime?

On a much grander scale, it puts me in mind of what Abraham Lincoln must have experienced as he made his way to Gettysburg to dedicate the cemetery there in 1863. How, he must have wondered, could he ever hope to do justice to the over 51,000 men who there were wounded or killed? His consternation was reflected in his great speech: "...*We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate -- we cannot consecrate -- we cannot hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.*"

So it will always be with us. We can never hallow, dedicate, or consecrate this day beyond what our God has already done. Though the world will little remember what we say about that day and that event, it can never forget what God has done for each of us by sending his Son. We must, therefore, content ourselves with taking a moment to marvel at the event, and to thank God for his grace – his undeserved love – in sending his Son to be our Savior.

We note, first of all, that when the Holy Spirit visits, great things happen! The Spirit of God entered John the Baptist and he dedicated his entire life to the singular calling of preparing the way for the Messiah. He was later given the title "Greatest man" by the Savior himself. The Holy Spirit visited Mary, and the virgin conceived God. That same Holy Spirit came to rest on the shoulder of the God-man Jesus at his baptism, and in his relatively short ministry this unknown peasant from Nazareth dramatically and unalterably changed the course of human history.

You hear much this time of year of different ideas on "*what Christmas is all about.*" Giving, caring, sharing; feeding, loving, visiting - man has all kinds of different ideas when it comes to what Christmas is all about. Christians have no such trouble. Christmas is all about one simply incredible fact: On this day, God was made man. How easy it is to pass right over that phrase without giving it a second thought. **God** was made **man**. On this Christmas morning we will give it a second thought, for our text leads us into some tremendous truths about that Baby in the Manger.

Consider first of all the perfection of heaven. Our text begins, "***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the***

Word was God." Our frail human minds really cannot grasp the magnificence of an eternal existence *with* God, let alone an eternal existence *as* God. Yet it was this that Jesus enjoyed, from eternity. We cannot imagine what it must have been like to leave eternity and to be born into time. We cannot know what it must have been like to have to leave the perfect existence of heaven - a place without sorrow or pain, struggle or persecution, need or want. There God the Son ruled with the Father from all eternity. What is more, he did not just exist as some sort of spectator in heaven, he took part in the creation of the universe. Our text tells us, "***All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.***" This is what Jesus left. To be made a man. He left heaven to become one of his own creation.

Being human is, of course, all that we know. We therefore find it rather difficult to loathe the very thing that we are. But think about humanity from God's perspective. How much time and money we spend each day just to keep this body of ours from becoming socially unacceptable. Being human is all we know, but it was not all that God knew. Think of it this way: How would you feel about existing no longer as a human being but as a garden slug? Puts a different perspective on things, doesn't it? If a garden slug could reason, I have no doubt each would find some reason to boast – "*My slime is better than your slime...*" – whatever.

So also it was no bargain for "God of God and Light of Light" to be made man. As fearfully and wonderfully as we are made by our Creator, we still have some serious limitations as human beings. Think for a moment of trying to make or create something. If you are anything like me, you can't draw anything more detailed than a stickman (and Confirmation students can attest to the fact that I struggle even there). Our fingers seem so clumsy and limited at times. We are never quite fast enough, strong enough, talented enough. In heaven, God the Son could simply command... and it was. Not only could the eternal Jesus create with just his word, every single thing that he made was "***very good***" - perfect in every way. *This* is the God that was made man, who took into his eternal, divine essence our human nature. It is nothing short of a miracle that such a God would ever consent to such a thing. Praise him for it on this the day that we celebrate his entrance into our world.

There is more. Have you ever thought about what it would be like to know the future? Personally I believe that it would be one of the greatest curses a human being could endure - especially if you were

powerless to change the course of events. Imagine knowing months or years in advance that you were going to suffer in a crippling accident. Imagine the horror of knowing a dear loved one was going to die or be permanently maimed, and that you were powerless to do anything about it.

Now think about Jesus. Jesus, as true God from eternity, did not leave heaven in ignorance. He knew full well what lay in store for him. Even after he took upon himself our humanity he knew. He regularly warned his disciples in advance exactly what was going to happen to him and, to a certain extent, of the suffering they themselves would also have to endure. How it must have pained him to know that Judas would betray him and perish in hell. How it must have saddened him to know ahead of time that all of his top men, even his Apostles, would abandon him at virtually the first sign of trouble. How terrible to know that one of his greatest men, Peter, would with oaths deny that he even knew Jesus, let alone that he believed in him.

And yet all of this was still as nothing compared to the horror of knowing that he would suffer the penalty of hell for all mankind. What strength and resolve, what determination and courage, what humility and love it took for Jesus to consent to be born into our world, knowing he would be forsaken not just by man, but by his own Heavenly Father. Who can truly comprehend such a sacrifice, such pure, self-sacrificial love?

Recognize in all of this the marvel and the miracle of the birth we celebrate on this day. Struggle to come to appreciate the magnitude of the sacrifice, as well as the love and courage necessary for Jesus to do what he did for us. Then take these sublime, comforting truths into your heart and ponder them carefully, as did Mary. Recognize therein the depth of the love our Lord Jesus must have had for us sinners.

Rest assured then too that such love from our Savior can surely never end. The same One who left heaven to offer himself for us most certainly loves us every bit as much even now, at this very moment. The same Savior who gave us all, and who has promised to be with us always, will certainly never abandon or forsake us – especially at those critical times when we need him most. Moment by moment he continues to reign as our Savior-God, our Good Shepherd.

May each one of you experience the true and pure love of our Lord's incarnation, on this special day and always. Amen.

The Pre-Sermon Hymn -710 *(Brown Hymnal)*
"Once In Royal David's City"

The Sermon – Text: John 1:1-18
The Christmas Address by the Pastor

The Post-Sermon Hymn -92 *(Red Hymnal)*
"Now Sing We, Now Rejoice"

The Prayers followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -91 *(Stanzas 1-2, 4-5 & 9) (Red Hymnal)*
"Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this Christmas morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!

St. Paul Lutheran Church is a member congregation of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative synod with congregations throughout the United States and missions and affiliates around the world. If you are visiting from another city, please ask the pastor for the name of a CLC church near you.

Announcements:

Christmas Flowers – If you purchased one of the poinsettias with which the church has been decorated again this Christmas season, please feel free to take your plant(s) home with you after the service this morning, or consider gifting them to someone who might enjoy them.

Schedule – Please note that there is no Confirmation Class or Midweek Bible Study scheduled for this week or next. Both are scheduled to resume on January 8th. It is our intention to follow the regular schedule next Sunday, including Bible Class and Sunday School at 9am and Sunday Worship at 10am..



St Paul Lutheran Church Bismarck, ND

Christmas Day Service 2019



ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave, Bismarck, ND 58501

Office and Parsonage: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

www.bismarcklutheran.com

Mark Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor

Christmas Day Service – December 25, 2019

Pre-Service Music

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn -87 (*Stanza 1*) (*Red Hymnal*)
"Joy to the World"

Scripture Reading by the Pastor

(*Isaiah 9:2, 6-7*) The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined... ⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

The Response Sung by the Congregation – (Hymn 79)

Rejoice, rejoice this happy morn, a Savior unto us is born,
The Christ the Lord of Glory.
His lowly birth in Bethlehem the angels from on high proclaim
And sing redemption's story.
My soul, extol God's great favor, bless Him ever for salvation.
Give Him praise and adoration.

Call to Repentance by the Pastor

On this great day we lift our hearts and voices in thanksgiving to our God. Yet our joy on this occasion is also mixed with sobriety, for we recognize that it was our sin that brought Jesus to earth, where He paid the penalty that we deserved. It is fitting and right therefore that we humbly confess our sins to our God on this morning when we celebrate the birth of the One who came to pay for those sins.

The Confession of Sins (*Sung to "Oh Come Oh Come Emmanuel"*)

1. Alas, my God, my sins are great, my conscience doth upbraid me;
And now I find that in my strait, no man hath power to aid me.
Forgive me Lord; turn not my soul away; for Jesus died to save me.

2. And fled I hence in my despair, in some lone spot to hide me,
My griefs would still be with me there, and peace still be denied me.
Forgive me Lord; turn not my soul away; for Jesus died to save me.
3. Lord, Thee I seek, I merit naught; yet pity and restore me.
Just God, be not Thy wrath my lot; Thy Son hath suffered for me.
Forgive me Lord; turn not my soul away; for Jesus died to save me.

Absolution (*Announced by the Pastor*)

Response (*Sung to the tune of 708 "Oh Come All Ye Faithful"*)

The Lord God be with us, and with all His children
Oh come let us lift our spirits unto the Lord
With hearts rejoicing, thanks to Him we render
With joy we come before Him, in gratefulness implore Him
With thankful hearts adore Him, Christ the Lord!

The Collect for the Day (*Read by the Pastor*)

Grant, Almighty God, that the birth of Your only-begotten Son in human flesh may bring true joy to our hearts – we who through sin were held in the bondage of darkness and despair. This we ask through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

The Scripture Lessons:

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 62:1-4,10-12) As the Lord dealt with our sin problem in a most remarkable way, so it ought not surprise us that the Lord also demonstrated his power in a most remarkable way. The great power of God is his love and mercy, demonstrated nowhere more clearly than in the gift of His Son as our Savior.

The New Testament Lesson: (Galatians 4:1-7) Our New Testament reading gives us a special insight into the event we celebrate on this day – the birth of our Lord Jesus. God was not slow in keeping his promise to send our Savior. He knew there was a "just right time" and he sent Jesus at just that right time.

The Confession of Faith – (The Christmas Creed)

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Who sent His Son to become my Savior;

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, my Lord, the long-promised Messiah, Who came as foretold, being conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, announced by the angels, worshipped by the shepherds, adored by the Wise Men, Who lived to suffer, die, and rise again, To free me from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil;

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, Who has brought me to faith in my Savior, And by whose continuous work in my heart, I rejoice in my salvation, Walk in Christ, Show forth His praises, And will one day live and reign with Him in all eternity. Amen.