

"In the Ordinary, the Extraordinary"

Christmas Day - 2018

Text: Luke 2:7-11

*How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is given
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in. (TLH
647 v.3)*

Dear Fellow Christians: today is a day for celebration – obviously so. Christ the King is born. God is made man. Our Savior – the only hope that any of us had to escape an eternity in hell – Jesus the Christ has indeed been born. Thanks be to God, who has given us this victory through this same Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!

Yet in the midst of our celebration, we pause for a bit, for there is something here that seems amiss somehow – more than just a bit out of the ordinary. The story of Jesus' birth is well known, but this morning we pause to reflect on (to seek to comprehend) the true character or nature of this event. Our goal is to pause long enough during this busy time to evaluate this event in terms of what it was and what it was not – an exercise that will result in a greater appreciation and understanding of this day. Whenever we do so pause to contemplate, we cannot help but be struck by what was *not* part of this magnificent event, several things that are missing that you and I would expect to be there.

This is why we gather here today during this time. This is why we jealously guard this time on this day and dedicate it to time spent in the Lord's house. You know by heart the story of the birth of the King of kings and Lord of lords, but the very familiarity of the account can tend to hide or mask what our God has communicated to us. This truth of God-made-man is indeed amazing in every respect, but it is a truth so well known to us that we can easily miss the extraordinary in the ordinary, the sublime in the mundane. That, again, is part of why we are here today. To truly commemorate and contemplate this unique event we must understand it to the fullest extent possible.

Our text for this Christmas morning is that familiar account of the birth of the Son of God, found recorded in Luke's Gospel, the Second Chapter:

*ESV **Luke 2:4-11** And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem,*

because he was of the house and lineage of David,⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

This is God's Word – the very words he has given to us to communicate the kind of birth he chose for His only Son. God grant that each one of us might, like Mary, **"treasure up all of these things, and ponder them in our hearts."** To that end we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

To rightly understand and appreciate the familiar, we need to question it. That does not mean we are supposed to doubt or challenge it; it means we are supposed to grasp the thing in our hands, to turn it this way and that, and to examine it with fresh eyes and an inquisitive mind. We do that best and most effectively not by taking the thing as a whole, but by breaking it down and examining each individual part, each individual word and thought. That's how we discover the extraordinary in the ordinary.

The first thing we question this morning is the setting. Ask yourself therefore this question before we go any further: *Who here would have scripted the birth of the Son of God and Savior of the World in the way that it actually happened?* The grand account, now so familiar to all of us, was certainly not what we could ever have expected. We could never have guessed the plan God had in mind for our salvation. There is, in fact, not a single human being who would have planned the salvation of mankind in this way. Who, after all, could have expected God to enter his own mortal world as a weak and helpless child? In fact that simple reality reveals to us just exactly what is missing in the account of our Lord's birth. When we stop and think about it, isn't that what seems strange and unexpected here? *There is no mention of royalty, nobility, or splendor of any kind. God was made man* in Christ Jesus, and yet from first to last the story of our Lord's birth was one of poverty and humility. It is actually the total lack of grandeur that makes this event so spectacular.

Considering just who was born, we should naturally wonder, "Where is the palace? Where are the royal attendants, the armed guards, and the palace musicians? Where are all of the heads of state, and why were no official announcements made to those in power and authority?" Instead we find that not only are the mother and father common folk - peasants in the eyes of the world – they carried with them the stigma of shame in the months leading up to the birth. Consider the simple words in our text: **Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child."**

Again, the words are so familiar you probably didn't even notice the problem. Try to see this whole situation as the society of that day would have seen it. What the world saw when they looked at this couple, if they bothered to look at all, was an unfaithful unwed mother-to-be and her naïve fiancé. This God obviously knew beforehand, and yet his plan for the entrance into our world of his own Son was that he would carry the stigma of an illegitimate child – born to the ancient equivalent of trailer trash. Nor should we imagine that any protestations or explanations from Joseph or Mary would have persuaded anyone. In fact they would probably only have deepened and confirmed the general consensus that these were people of low repute – so low in fact that they would not even admit their sin but tried to cover it up with a lie. Ask yourself, "Would you have believed them?"

In the eyes of the world of their day, this family actually got what they deserved. They are relegated to a stable and have to give birth where animals feed. There is and should be no satin-lined bed for their kind, only a cattle trough. No officials are notified of the birth, but why would they be? The birth itself is just the natural culmination of shame – the result of sin. Only the poor working class shepherds living out in the fields surrounding the tiny town of Bethlehem seemed to find the birth remarkable, and then only because they claimed to have been informed of the birth by angels.

And yet you and I don't see anything like this when we look back at this event. Why not? Because God the Holy Spirit has been at work in our hearts. Thank and praise him for it, especially on this day! It is the Holy Spirit that allows you to look at that which, for all outward appearance, looks ordinary, and to recognize the extraordinary. You see Jesus not as a product of sin and shame but as a King that can be approached - one to whom we can relate and who in turn can relate to us. You can see that if humankind cannot find an accessible Savior here in Jesus Christ, then

one can never be found. Here we are witness to an entry of complete and utter humility into a world of sin. Here we find, from beginning to end, salvation of the poor, by the One who made himself poor.

There is another extraordinary truth in the account of the birth of our Savior that we often miss, simply because it gets lost in the ordinary, familiar words of our text. The words are these: **For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**

You've heard the words hundreds of times, perhaps more, but what we usually miss in them is not the "**Savior...Christ the Lord**" part. It is the "**for you.**"

Who, after all, ever says that? Did you catch the obvious irony and import contained in those two simple words? Do you understand just why these two simple words are so special and unique?

When someone has a baby, they proclaim the happy news with "*We had our baby!*" or "*My wife had her baby!*" But not so *this* birth. No one announces that a baby has been born to you, but that a baby has been born to them. Again, not so *this* baby. The angels did not proclaim, "*Unto his parents a baby has been born!*" they proclaimed, "**For unto you is born...**"

Don't miss these words and their importance. This was not Mary's baby, even though she was obviously his mother. That's why the angels did not proclaim, "unto Mary..." but "**unto you...**" This is God's own revelation that this is *our* Baby, *our* Child. Though he was given as a gift *through* Mary, he was given *to you* and me and every other human being that would ever live. That is precisely why the angels began as they did in their announcement to the shepherds: "**Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.**"

By this we are taught that this day, this event, belongs not to Mary and Joseph, and not even to Christians alone. It belongs to mankind. "**God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself...**" There is no reason to believe that every single one of the shepherds were believers, each of them looking forward anxiously to the birth of the Messiah, and yet the angels declared: "**For unto you is born...**"

Though the world, by and large, does not recognize this gift, it is theirs. God the Father wants it to be theirs. He longs to lay this child also in

their arms and to have every single human being look with eyes of faith on this priceless treasure as their very own – *their* Child.

Thus our Lord Jesus entered this life on that first Christmas over 2000 years ago. He entered our world humble and seemingly of no account. Though extraordinary, in a way it was appropriate, for he had only just begun to carry out his work of a lifetime. He came in the midst of poverty and want, of dirt and straw and manure, to show each of us both the spiritual want we all suffer without him and the true nature of our own sin.

And yet he came for us, sinners all. And there too we see the extraordinary in the ordinary, as we will also then see the extraordinary when he comes again.

There are many things that make Christmas extraordinary. This morning we have seen just a few. The Christmas story is from first to last a holiday for humble folk, like you and me. The Christmas story reveals a Savior who did not come to condemn but to save; a Savior who came not to denounce us for the filth of sin, but to take that filth upon himself. By his humble birth, life, and death, he has made us clean and pure in the sight of God. Think on these facts each time you look with the eyes of faith and understanding into that crude little manger there in Bethlehem. See there the King of kings and the Lord of lords, who made himself *nothing* so that we might be *something* in God's eyes - born again children of God, heirs of eternal joy in heaven. Truly extraordinary. Amen.

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Christmas Day Service – December 25, 2018

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.

The Pre-Sermon Hymn -712 *(Brown Hymnal)*

"What Child Is This?"

The Sermon – Text: Luke 2:7-11

The Christmas Address by the Pastor

The Post-Sermon Hymn -85 *(Verses 1-6) (Red Hymnal)*

"From Heaven above to Earth I Come"

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 and fellowship hall have been decorated again this Christmas season, please feel free to take your plant(s) home with you after the service this morning, or consider taking 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 9. We will follow the regular schedule next Sunday, and the new Church Council is scheduled to be installed at the regular service on January 6.