

Luke 2:1–20
Christmas Eve
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
December 24, 2022

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

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. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

The joyous Christmas season is finally here! Throughout the year Christians look forward to this festival with joyful expectation. After a difficult year, God lets us enjoy this foretaste of the eternal celebration of heaven. This evening, all around the world, millions stream into the house of God to praise God in all languages. This evening, many who are poor forget their poverty and feel rich. This evening, many who are rich forget their earthly wealth and contemplate the treasures of heaven. This evening, those who are sick long to join us in the House of God. Today even those who are otherwise indifferent to the Christian message are drawn into this universal Christian joy.

The joyous Christmas season is finally here! Christians have been preparing themselves for Christmas for the last four weeks of Advent, which is a season of repentance and preparation. But that’s not Christmas yet. In the secular world, Christmas is basically over now. Christmas music began playing on the radio at the beginning of November. Stores started selling Christmas merchandise back in September, or even earlier. Before that there was Christmas in July. People are drawn to the joy of Christmas throughout the year, even if only as a way to escape from the difficulties of reality. Now, I’m not saying that it’s wrong to enjoy secular Christmas movies, or music, or to put up your Christmas Tree in October. What I’m saying is that the joy of Christmas

can easily become detached from what we are actually celebrating; detached from the real miracle of Christmas.

So what are we celebrating today? What is the cause of our Christmas joy? What is the real miracle of Christmas? As you know, it is that today, more than 2,000 years ago, a child was born in the little town of Bethlehem, naked and vulnerable as all newborn children are. He was born in a dark, gloomy stall and layed in a feeding trough. This child seemed to be the most lowly of all who were ever born. The world would laugh if it knew the true meaning of our Christmas joy, that we Christians celebrate such a common thing as the birth of a child. The world seeks passing, and empty glory. It is blind to true glory, to heavenly, eternal, and divine glory. The world is blind to the glory and majesty of this lowly, common child. The unbelieving world is blind to the true Christmas joy that comes with the birth of Christ because it is a joy that comes in lowliness.

In many ways the birth of Christ really was like any other birth. It took place within history, at a specific time and in a specific place. "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town." It was in a very real, historical setting that Christ was born into this world, just like anybody else. It didn't look like it at the time, and it doesn't look like it to many people today, but that day was the most important day in history. The birth of Jesus Christ looked like any other birth, but it was the fulfillment of the longing and hope of all nations, even though they didn't realize it yet. When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law (Galatians 4:4), born naked, weak, and vulnerable like any other child. Indeed, Christ's birth was lowlier than most other births; he was born in a small town in a lowly cattle stall, to an unwed mother.

Nine months earlier, the angel Gabriel had appeared to the Virgin Mary and told her that she would conceive and bear a son and call his name Jesus. The Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her, so that the child would be called holy—the Son of God. God would be His Father. Mary would be His mother. A miracle of miracles! Nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:26-38). When Mary was found to be pregnant, her fiance Joseph thought to separate from her. Again, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him that the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit. They would call his name Jesus because he would save his people from their sins, as the prophet Isaiah prophesied 700 years earlier: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name ‘Immanuel,’ which means ‘God with us.’” (Matthew 1:18-25)

And now the angel could announce the birth of the Christ child to the lowly shepherds, yet in a way that we see a glimpse of this child’s true, eternal glory. “And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.” The shepherds were afraid because those who are unholy cannot stand before what is holy and survive. Sinners cannot survive the glory of God’s presence. But the angel continued: “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

The message of joy is that God the Lord, the creator of all things, became man in Christ Jesus. God and man are united. God has become man; a man has become God! Eternity is united with time. The creator of all things has become a creature. The true Son of the living God has become the child of a woman. He is Immanuel, God with us! As one old German Christmas hymn puts it: “He leaves his heavenly Father’s throne, Is born an infant small, And in a manger, poor and lone, Lies in a humble stall. Within an earthborn form He hides His all creating light;

To serve us all He humbly cloaks the splendor of His might.” The eternal light has come down into our dark world, to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. He has become a member of our family. God is now our blood relation, a brother of sinners, a member of the human race.

The message of the angel is also a message of joy because of what this child was born to do. Christ the Lord, born in Bethlehem, the city of David, is Savior. The shepherds don't need to be afraid, we don't need to be afraid, because the sinless God has come to save us sinners. God took on human flesh and was born of the Virgin Mary not to condemn the world, but to save it (John 3:17) by dying on the cross and rising again. God sent forth His Son in the fullness of time to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons in Holy Baptism.

God took on human flesh and blood so He could sacrifice it for us on the cross, dying the death that we deserved. God took on human flesh and blood and feeds us that very flesh and blood in the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of sins. And where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation. We have eternal life and salvation today and forever because of that lowly child born in Bethlehem. With the multitude of the heavenly host, we praise God and say “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” For it is in the lowly child of Bethlehem that all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross (Colossians 1:20). Oh what a message of great joy for all people!

And what kind of a sign did the angels give the shepherds to find the Christ child, the Lord of the universe become man? The angel said to them: “You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” The all-powerful God would be recognized as a lowly

child, a weak and vulnerable infant. God's power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). God's power is made perfect in the weakness of this lowly, flesh and blood child. God's power is made perfect in the common water of Baptism and in the common bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, in Christ's body and blood given for you. God's power is made perfect in our weakness too, in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities we face in this life for the sake of Christ. It is when we are weak that we are strong in Christ Jesus our Lord. The joy of Christmas is that our Lord became weak that we might become strong in Him.

The joyous Christmas season is finally here! God has become man for us. We have beheld the glory of the lowly Christ child. With the angels and the shepherds we rejoice because of the good news of great joy that is for all people, that Christ the Savior is born. With them we make known what has been told us concerning this child. Like Mary, we treasure up all these things, pondering them in our hearts. We glorify and praise God for all we have heard and seen, as it has been told us in Holy Scripture. The world may be drawn to Christmas because of its sentimentality, but we are reminded this evening of the real miracle of Christmas, a message of great joy for all people: "unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." May the peace and joy of the lowly Christ child, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, be with you during this Christmas season and always. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.