

Sermon for Christmas Day

Date: December 25, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Isaiah 9:2-7

Epistle Reading: Titus 2:11-14

Gospel Reading: Luke 2:1-14

Sermon Text: Luke 2:1-14

Sermon Title: What Child Is This?

Introit: Psalm 93:1–2, 5; antiphon: Isaiah 9:2

Hymns:

LSB 387 – Joy to the World

LSB 361 – O Little Town of Bethlehem

LSB 365 – Away in a Manger

Joy to the World, the Lord Is Born

Joy to the World, the Lamb of God

LSB 937 – Lord, Bid Your Servant Go in Peace

LSB 384 – Of the Father's Love Begotten

Distribution:

LSB 380 – Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

LSB 367 – Angels from the Realms of Glory

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Creative Worship



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Text: Luke 2:1–14

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. 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, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 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.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a 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. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

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Grace to you in Jesus' name. Amen.

When a child is born, there are questions we typically ask. Parents ask, "Is he healthy?" "How much does he weigh?" Grandparents ask, "What did you name her?" "Who does she look like?" Nurses and doctors closely examine the child and want to know, "Is he alert?" "Are her lungs clear?" We expect these kinds of questions.

There are other questions we never expect to hear at the birth of a healthy child. Who would ever ask, "Who will handle his funeral arrangements?" Or, "What cemetery do you think she'll be buried in?" Or, "What will cause his death?" "For everything there is a season," the Scriptures say, and the season for asking about a person's death is usually not at his birth.

One of our hymns asks a similarly unusual question about a child born in Bethlehem: *What Child Is This?* Though odd, under the circumstances it is a fitting question because this Child is born in a most unusual way. His mother is a virgin. His birth is announced by an army of angels praising God. So, *What Child Is This?* The wonderful answer is proclaimed by an angel:

"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."

What Child Is This? This Child is no less than the Lord Himself, the Lord of heaven and earth. The Lord whose voice cracks mountains now coos softly in His mother's arms. The same Lord, who told shepherd Moses to not come near because the Lord's presence was too holy, now invites shepherds to draw near to Him as He lies in a manger. The shepherd Moses hid his face from the Lord, but now shepherds behold the Lord's face. The face of a baby. The Unapproachable One is now approachable. The Intimidating One is now inviting.

That certainly is Good News, but the most important reason God's appearance in human flesh is good news of great joy is that He came to redeem us. The Lord of creation became part of His creation to recreate what we broke. The Immortal One was born as a mortal in a specific time and place to unite Himself forever with His mortal creatures.

What if the Lord had taken on flesh to confront mankind and demand payback for the sins committed against Him? What if He had appeared among us with a human face to scowl at us for our self-centeredness? Thanks be to God that His arrival is instead "good news of great joy" as the herald angel declared.

The reason it is good news of great joy is that at this Child's birth we do ask the normally unthinkable question, "How will this Child die?" You see this Child was born to die. This was God's plan even before the foundations of the earth were laid. This is what the heavenly angels are talking about when they say His birth will bring peace on earth. This Child will die because of us, and He will die for us.

The prophet Isaiah said:

"To us a child is born." The angel said, "Unto you is born this day ... a Savior."

Unto us, whose worldly goals conceive and give birth to worldly thoughts and ungodly living. Unto us, whose sinful hearts give birth to cruel and hurtful words, even against those who would care for us most. Unto us, whose sinful natures drive us to live as though God does not matter and we matter most. Unto us, sinners, this Child is born.

So repent and rejoice greatly for His holy birth this holy night! Yet in that, don't forget to rejoice for His holy death. Already at His birth, His cross, death, and burial are foreshadowed.



What Child Is This? The One who had a Mary at His birth and multiple Marys at His death.

What Child Is This? The One who had a righteous Joseph at His birth and a righteous Joseph (of Arimathea) at His death.

What Child Is This? The One who was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger at His birth and was wrapped in a shroud and laid in a tomb at His death.

What Child Is This? The One whose birth was honored by wise men bearing myrrh to His cradle, and whose death was honored by faithful women bearing myrrh to His tomb.

What Child Is This? This Child is the great light that has shown on us who dwell in a land of deep darkness, on us who walk in darkness.

What Child Is This? This is a real human child who has a real human body. His body was wrapped up and laid in a tomb. Then, on the third day, His real human body came back to life, the firstfruits of the resurrection of our human bodies too.

"The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people" in this Child. So let's do something that is normal at the birth of a child. Let's look closely

at this Son of Mary. The prophet Isaiah said all authority would be upon those little shoulders. This Child used His authority to free you from Hell and destruction.

Look closely at this Child. He has the lips of the Wonderful Counselor. He comforts your troubled conscience with the most wonderful counsel you could ever hear: “Father forgive them.”

Look closely at this Child. He has the hands of the Mighty God. He set aside that might to have His hands nailed to a cross and extend mercy to you through His Holy Meal.

Look closely at this Child. He has the arms of the Everlasting Father, arms that spread out on a cross to draw you to Himself, to wrap His arms around you in Holy Baptism, and to welcome you home as prodigal sons and daughters.

Look closely at this Child. He has the royal head of the Prince of Peace. A head crowned with thorns to place on your head a crown of glory.

“The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.” Today that salvation is again extended to you as a gift from this Child’s altar. It is Christmas, and Jesus is giving you the greatest of all gift—His very body and blood for the full forgiveness of your sins. A gift that renews you for good works, and inflames your love for your heavenly Father. What a wondrous gift of love this is.

What Child Is This? This is the Lord who has saved you. So:

“Haste, haste to bring Him laud,”

“Hail, hail the Word made flesh,”

“Joy, joy, for Christ is born, The babe, the son of Mary.”

Born for you.

Merry Christmas!

In the name of Jesus.

Amen.