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St. John's Lutheran Church – Kimball, NE
Third Sunday in Advent (Youth Christmas Program)
December 17, 2017
Text: Pageant Readings (Nativity readings)

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice (Phil. 4:4). That's what today's service is all about: rejoicing in the Lord who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem. Our congregation's youth have done us a great service today. Through music, song, drama, and words, they have proclaimed the greatest, most joyous event in human history. It's truly an angelic message of joy, "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" (vs. 10-11).

That universal message of great joy includes the shepherds of Bethlehem, the Wise Men from the East, North & South Americans, Europeans from the West, and even the exotic peoples of the far, Far East. Our children and youth have proclaimed the message but it isn't a child's tale; it's a divine proclamation of God Himself. Have we not heard today that God Himself loves us poor sinners so much that He left His realm of glory to do the impossible: save us human beings from sin, and death, Satan, and even His own wrath and judgment against those same evils. But then again, with God, nothing is impossible.

It's a wonderful thing our youth have done this morning. Thank you a million times over, and to everyone who supported and helped them. We ought not discount the role our children and youth can play in the life of Christ's beloved Church. The angel Gabriel was sent to a young virgin of Nazareth, Mary. The Bible doesn't tell us her age. In all likelihood, she was as young as 15 years old. A teenager was called by God the Father to be the mother of His eternal Son. God called John the Baptist to be our Lord's prophet and forerunner from his mother's womb. There was never a moment in his life he wasn't called by God to be the Messiah's prophet; pick whatever stage of development you want – toddler, adolescent, infant, young man – he was the prophet of the Messiah. Time would fail me to mention David, Esther, Timothy, Samson, and other youth called by God to do His wondrous will. Dear children and youth, you are

saints of God and members of Christ's beloved Church. You are more dear to Him and to us than all the universe.

But we adults must not lose sight of what's going on here today. Through music, song, drama, and words, we have heard the greatest, impossible-made-possible, story the world will ever know. Heed well, parents, grandparents, and adult friends, the message proclaimed through these children and young men. The Lord would use them to be messengers of His love and grace. Let us not be distracted by their costumes, their adorable actions, charming smiles, and beautiful music. They are mighty messengers of God's love.

The Child born in Bethlehem's manger is the joy the world, the Savior of sinners, the Wisdom of the wise, the king of creation, and the Son of God in human flesh and blood. Mary, Joseph, shepherds, and Wise Men didn't think up this idea of God's eternal Son becoming man. The Christmas story isn't an invention of man's imagination, not even a religious and pious imagination. This is God's doing from beginning to end. Take courage and comfort that everything we celebrate today is established in the initiative of God Himself. His love for you and me and this world is what compelled Him to take action to save us.

Before the you knew to ask for a Savior, God the Father sent One. Before you knew to ask for Wisdom from on high, He gave it. Before you knew you needed joy that transcends human understanding, God gave His Son to be conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. There, wrapped in swaddling clothes, is God's gift to you. This little Child in the manger will keep giving gifts to you when you need them most: when you are oppressed with guilt, when you are pressed down by your past, when you are at a loss for who you are and why you exist, when you fear for your life, even in the hour of your death. This Child is God's gift for you. This Child, celebrated today, is God's love and His decisive action to redeem you unto Himself.

This little One is a Savior born to you, to save you from your sins, to deliver you from your death, to redeem you from the Law and the wrath of God. Do not be afraid, says the angel. Look on this Child's face, and see the face of God come down to save you. This Child will grow up. He will open the eyes of the blind man. He will open the ears of the deaf. He will cast out the devils. He will still the storm and raise the dead. He will preach the kingdom of God having come in Him. He will hang on a cross and die. See the lengths to which God will go to rescue us! He divests Himself of His glory. He removes His royal robes, and exchanges them for diapers. He hides His power and

His majesty under the weakness of the infant in the manger, the man on the cross.

Don't be deceived by such weakness. This is the Christ, God's anointed One, His Messiah, the right hand of God reaching down to us. He is the Lord, Yahweh, God wearing our flesh, come to be with us as God had never been with us before.

The shepherds heard the preaching of the angel. They heard the "to you" of the angel's birth announcement and left their work and ran to Bethlehem worship at the manger. They found the purest, truest gift. And when they found Him, they rejoiced with exceeding joy. And the Bible tells us that they made known to all the surrounding region the message concerning this Child. Even the Wise Men, after worshiping Jesus and giving Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, they returned to their own country with the message they had seen the Lord's Christ, the King of the nations, the Savior of the World.

We can't go back to Bethlehem, and even if we could, we wouldn't find Christ there. But Bethlehem's gift can, and does, come to us. The Church is our Lord's humble abode, the place where He makes His dwelling in a world that has no place for Him. The Holy Scriptures are His manger. The One who once slept in a manger, who hung on a cross, who rose from the dead, and sits at the Father's right hand from whence He came and will come again, is found for us today in the words coming from the mouth of His preacher. He comes to us in the water of His Baptism, in the bread and wine of His Supper. Our fellowship with Him is enriched with prayers, hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs sung in His name. In these things, you will find Him, a Savior born to you, who is Christ the Lord. Every Sunday, every Divine Service where Jesus is proclaimed in Word, song, hymn and sacraments is Christmas. In response to such a marvelous Gift heaven and earth join together in symphonic praise, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (vs. 14).

Hear again the words of the angel, and rejoice. Again, I will say rejoice. For these words give us a gift from God Himself: "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" (vs. 10-11). A Merry Christmas to you all.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.