

Pastor Kenneth Mars
St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY
Christmas Eve (One-Year Series)
December 24, 2017
Text: Pericope Readings¹

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

“(Mary) will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

Tonight, I would like to revel in the contemplation of who this Jesus is. Who is this Jesus, whose birth we celebrate tonight with such devotion, pageantry, and beauty? “Who is He, the One who lies in the lap of the poor young maiden, Mary? Yes, He has the form of an ordinary human child. No visible rays of glory play around His friendly face. But what does the angel of the Lord say to the amazed shepherds? Really, to the entire world, “He is Christ the Lord,” That baby is [Jahweh], the God of all, blessed to all eternity.

“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: (God) was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory” (I Timothy 3:16).

Oh, wonderful message! God and man are united with this birth. God has become a man; a man has become God! The eternal united with a mortal. The all-powerful united with powerless dust. Eternal love wedded with that which hates her. The Most Holy united with the sinner. The Creator joined with a creature, with His most needy creature, a newborn baby. The Lord of lords before whom all angels and archangels must bow in worshipful adoration shackles Himself to the servants of sin and Satan. He who carries all in His hands and has sown the myriads of stars as seed on the field of the firmament, becomes weak with the weak, helpless with the helpless, and permits Himself to be lifted and carried by sinful hands: Mary, Joseph, Simeon, and then years later, Jesus would be carried along by wicked men who would see Him die by crucifixion.

¹ A hearty thanks to my forefather in the faith, C.F.W. Walther, from whom the majority of this sermon is taken.

He whom the heavenly Father in His eternal glory today declared to be the image of His essence and the reflection of His glory, the same with Him in divine majesty, the true Son of the living God, the everlasting Father, becomes the child of a human being, a blood relation, a brother of sinners, my brother; He becomes a fellow-descendant of Adam, our forefather who plunged us all into sin and death. Jesus takes upon Himself the nature of our weak human race which deprived itself of its nobility and became an abomination before angels and all creatures. He, the eternal light before whom even the light of heaven is darkness, who lives in a light that none can approach, comes down into our dark world in order to become a member of the same family with those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14) “which means God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

He, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, for whom the skies merely serve as His throne and the earth as His footstool, descends in order to share their huts of earth and clay with the inhabitants of dust. He, who alone writes in and erases from the Book of Life, today permits His name to be enrolled in the list of men as the least and poorest of them.

Oh, great is the mystery of godliness, “God was manifested in the flesh!” What mind of man or even that of angels dares look into the depths of this divine counsel revealed today and is able to see the depths of God’s wisdom? The holy angels with bowed countenance desire to look into it, but finding no bottom in this (depths) of God’s heart, can only cry out in adoration, “Glory to God in the highest!”

What are all God’s miracles compared with this miracle, “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14)? What is the miracle of creation? What is the wonderful structure of the firmament resting upon invisible pillars? What are its countless stars traveling in eternal order in their orbits? What is the miracle of the preservation of each and every living and moving being? What are these wonders of the power of the Almighty, all these miracles of the wisdom of the Omniscient, all these miracles of the love of the All-loving, about which the morning stars praised God in eternity and all the sons of God shouted for joy? What are all these compared with that miracle, that God divested Himself of His divine glory, descended from His throne that stands over all the heavens, took not only the form but also the nature of a creature, a creature that had fallen from Him; God becomes a man, a man in the form of a servant, a child, a brother of sinners?

Tell me, what language has words enough to express the importance of such a birth? When the angels had praised it in an earthly language, they quickly hurried back into heaven in order to begin the song there in the language of heaven, that they might celebrate this deed of God in song before His throne forever and ever. What should, what can we do? We can do nothing but throw ourselves into divine worship and stammer hallelujahs to Him who to the amazement of all creatures today took in Bethlehem not the nature of a holy angel but, mystery of mysteries, miracles of miracles, the nature of a man!” (Walther, *Gospel Sermons*, Vol. 1, p. 42–44)

“And the angel said unto (the shepherds), Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ¹⁴Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:10–14).

“Why can and should we also join this singing, we who can only see the glory of God’s incarnation through the eyes of faith? Because this miracle of love concerns us most of all. It means peace on earth and eternal goodwill, that is, happiness and eternal salvation. Behold, the humility and misery with which the Son of God enters our world is nothing else than the guilt and misery of our sins, which He took upon Himself. Now it lies on Him and is taken from us. We are relieved of it forever. That the Son of God was born in a stall is of such great merit that it earned for us the mansions of His Father’s house. His lying in a manger merits eternal rest in the lap of God. His wretched swaddling clothes are the shining garments of divine righteousness. His becoming a child makes us His brothers and children of His heavenly Father; He gives men a nobility which even the angels do not have; men are now of royal race. When the Son of God descended from heaven and appeared as a citizen of earth, He made this small dwelling place the center of the universe, God’s place upon which He looks with unspeakable love and good will; yes, the walls of heaven now surround earth. Because the Son of God stooped to our level, we are lifted up from the dust to the throne of God’s glory” (Walther, *Gospel Sermons*, Vol. 1, p. 45).

“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: (God) was manifested in the flesh...” His name is Jesus. Our Lord and Savior, the joy and salvation of all the earth! 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.