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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY
Christmas Day
December 25, 2016
Text: John 1:1–18

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

In the name of Jesus...Merry Christmas to you all!

If you want a single sentence to summarize everything I was trying say during last night's worship service, it would have to be Hebrews 1:1, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets..." Through the many centuries leading up to Christ's birth in Bethlehem, prophets spoke to our forefathers in the faith about the coming of the Savior. So last night, we heard about the OT witness to Jesus' birth from Genesis 3 (the seed of the woman), Isaiah 11 (the branch from the stump of Jesse), and Daniel 2 (the stone made without hands that grows into an eternal kingdom). God the Father almighty spoke to our fathers in the faith by the prophets about the coming of Jesus. That was last night.

This morning, we continue with Hebrews 1:2, "...but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son, whom he appointed the heir of things, through whom also he created the world." The writer to the book of Hebrews and John the apostle don't give much attention to all the details we normally associate with Christmas: shepherds, mangers, angelic visits, decrees issued by Caesar Augustus, inns too full for a virgin maiden great with child, mangers, etc. Instead, they give more attention to the profound mystery underlying Mary and Joseph's beautiful and true history.

God the Father speaks to us in these last days, says the author of Hebrews. Did you notice that? These are the last days. What marks these last days as being different from earlier days is that now the Father speaks to us, not through prophets, but through His Son, the One born of Mary in Bethlehem. Or to use John's language...God the Father speaks to us through His Son who is the Word that was with God, the Word that is God (vs. 1–2).

The Father's Son, by whom He speaks in these last days, is, according to Hebrews 1:3, "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power." John's gospel speaks in a similar way

about the Word, “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life and the life was the light of men” (vs. 3–4). The marvel and mystery of Christmas is that Jesus, Mary’s Son, born in Bethlehem’s manger, is the Son of the Father Almighty; Jesus is the Word of God through which the universe was not only created but also is upheld and preserved.

Set aside, for a moment, our normal Christmas expectations about shepherds and angels. Instead, hear what Hebrews and John are saying to us. That baby born of Mary is the Son of the Father, the exact imprint of the Father’s divine nature. That infant being nurtured and tenderly held by Mary Himself upholds the universe. Mary holds Jesus while He, as an infant boy, is upholding the universe by the word of his power. That helpless infant Boy who cannot even crawl across the manger floor possesses the power to sustain the universe with its billions and billions and billions of stars. That infant, whose parents are poor and lowly without any earthly significance, is the Son of the Father who appointed His Son to be the heir of all things. No room was found in an inn for the One who is to inherit all things, visible and invisible. That is the glorious wonder and joyous mystery of Christmas.

John’s Gospel describes this wonder of wonders with a phrase that should be emblazoned on your hearts and minds, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” The Word who is God and was with God and by whom the Father spoke the universe into existence and who upholds it by His own power...that one became flesh and dwelt among us.

The many pagan gods of antiquity were said to have come down from the heavens. They interacted with mankind, sometimes for good, sometimes for ill. But it was never said that the gods actually became human, that they took upon themselves our flesh and blood nature. The Christmas message that we celebrate in songs, hymns, carols, art, pageantry, and reverent worship is the shocking truth that changed the world. We know, without any doubt or equivocation, that God loves His people. For He did the unthinkable. God became man. Everything that comes to mind when we think of Christmas – all the details of Matthew 1 and Luke 2 – should be understood through the lens of that powerful phrase, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

I'd like to share a story Martin Luther once told his congregation on Christmas Day, 1534. It will help illustrate the honor and dignity bestowed upon us by God the Word becoming flesh:

When we were still under the papacy, they used to tell this story. Once upon a time the devil attended Mass in a church where it was customary in either the Lord's Prayer or in the Creed to sing ... "God's Son has become a human being." While they were singing this, the people just remained standing and did not kneel down. The devil was so incensed, that he slammed his fist into one man's mouth, saying, You boorish bum, aren't you ashamed to just stand there like a post and refuse to kneel for joy? If God had become OUR brother, as he did become YOUR brother, our joy would be so great that we wouldn't know what to do with ourselves.

That story may be pure fiction, but if so, then it was invented by someone who was very intelligent and who correctly understood the great honor which was bestowed on us, when God's Son became a human being in a totally different way from Adam or Eve. (*Luther's House Postils*, V. 5, p. 134).

Luther shares this story for the purpose of helping us see the amazing mystery of Christmas. Even the devils are astounded that God's eternal Son became man. Though the story is certainly fiction, it highlights, I think, everything we are celebrating today. We don't become gods; that was Satan's lie in the Garden of Eden, the lie that is still being told to this very day in many and various ways. Instead, God became one of us. That God in the flesh is our Lord, our Savior, our hope and heart's desire.

When you eat your Christmas meals today, raise a toast of honor to the Son of God. He is the exact imprint of God's divine nature now seen in the glory of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us in order to love us and save us.

Let all God's angels worship him. Let all creation exalt their Lord and Creator. Let all God's redeemed and sanctified saints adore Him with joy and hearty praise. 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.