



St John Lutheran Church

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Luke 2:1-20

"The Living Nativity"

Fairy tales begin with the words, "**Once upon a time.**" **But the Christmas Gospel begins** with the words, "**And it came to pass in those days.**" **Fairy tales occur** in mythical lands. **But today's Gospel** occurs in the real town of Bethlehem during the actual reign of Caesar Augustus and Quirinius.

This is tremendously important for us to recognize....**for in our** pop culture, Christmas often focuses on make-believe and fantasy. **Those things can** certainly have their proper place. **But it seems** that, for many, **the "stuff"** of Christmas-the lights and gifts and music-can become a flight into an imaginary world... **a temporary** retreat from the real world and real life. **And that is** the exact opposite of the Christmas message. **Luke emphasizes here** that what he is writing is real history. **It actually occurred** in a real place... **and at** a real time ...**when certain** real officials were in power. **It isn't a legend or a myth or a fable. It is true...it is an** accurate and factual account of the way things really were.

Christmas is not about escaping into some fantasy, dream world. **It's about our** life in the real world being redeemed and renewed by the Lord who came to us in our flesh! **It's about the** real Son of God... **through whom** all things were created... **entering into** His creation as a true and literal baby boy... **with real** flesh and blood. **It's about a** first-time Mom giving Him birth in the humblest of circumstances...**in the** cold of night among real livestock and hay and smell. **It's about the** Lord of all taking on the form of a servant and being laid in a cattle feeder in order that He might rescue us from our sin. **There is nothing** unreal or imaginary about Christmas. **For Jesus is the concrete and tangible love of God come to walk among us. Jesus is Immanuel...God with us!**

Christ was born with the animals. **For we... because** of sin had become like the beasts...**survival of the fittest... self-preservation** at all costs... **following our** basest instincts and desires. **We have all** fallen away from God... **wanting to** go our own way and do our own thing. **In the process** we have become less than human... **inhuman** creatures. **And so in** order to save us from perishing eternally... **Jesus the Son** of God took on our human nature and made Himself to be placed in a feeding trough. **The one who** slept near the animals came to lift us **out of our inhumanity** and set us free from the beastly power of death and the devil. **Jesus descended** to the depths of our fallenness in order to raise us with Himself to the heights of eternal life. **He became like us so that we may become like Him.**

In the stable with the animals, we see Jesus as the new Adam... **who has** come to restore us and all things to paradise... **to recreate** us by His coming in the flesh. **God the Son** took our humanity into Himself so that we might be made new in Him. **By His conception** and birth... **Jesus has** sanctified and purified our natures. **His incarnation permeates** and hallows mankind. **God has greatly** exalted us by becoming not an angel or any other creature but a true man... **our human brother**.

Christ became one of us in order that He might take our place under the Law to free us from its hellish judgment. **Jesus' lowly birth** teaches us of the humble life He would lead for us... **and the lowly death** He would suffer on our behalf. **The wood of** a manger would later be traded for the wood of a cross. **In fact it** was a tradition in some early Christian art to portray the birth of Christ as having taken place in a cave... perhaps in a hillside. **This was done** not only because animals in that region were often kept in caves or in stables built into an embankment... **but also** because this foreshadowed a later time when Christ would be buried in a cave-like tomb. **Indeed, just as** Jesus was here wrapped in rag-like cloths in His birth... **so also** He would be wrapped in rag-like cloths in His death.

The Son of God was born among us and became man for this very purpose... **that He** might die in the flesh in our place and shed His Blood to ransom and purchase us from the powers of darkness. **He was made** to be like us in every way... **except without sin...** **so that** He might be our perfect stand in. **As true man** He was our substitute in death... **and as true God** He paid the infinite price our sins required... **which we** could not even begin to pay. **Therefore, only in this God-man is there eternal life.** **Only in this One** who was laid in a manger... **who is** now bodily raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father... **is there salvation.** **For only He** could accomplish it. **Every other religion** is an illusion and a false hope.

The angels tell us of our only real hope: "**Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**" **Fear not...** **do not** be in terror any longer of death or of the Judgment of God. **For your sins** are forgiven. **Even the evils** and the injustices that have been done to you have been cleansed from you by this holy birth. **Christ the Savior** has come to rescue you from the devil's prison of death and torment... **and to** bring you into the Eternal Kingdom of God. **Light has broken** in and shattered the darkness forever. **Rejoice greatly** in the Good News! **For all of this** is for you. **Jesus is born to you...** **the angels** said. **He is your merciful King... your gracious Lord.**

The angels certainly rejoiced over what God was doing for us. **After announcing the** good tidings to the shepherds... **a whole** multitude of the Heavenly Host spilled over Heaven's edge and burst forth with praise to God... **saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!"** **The very coming** of Christ is a sign of God's good will toward us... **that He** wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Only Jesus brings real peace on earth...**not simply** temporary peace between people... **but eternal** peace with God. **In Christ we** who were once at war with God are now reconciled and put right with Him. **God and man** come together in Jesus... **for He** is Himself both God and man in one

special and inseparable being. **Those who believe** and are baptized into the Body of Christ are thereby reunited with God. **Truly Jesus is** your Prince of Peace.

The shepherds were given a sign... **a baby** wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. **You also are** given a sign of where to find Jesus. **He is to** be found humbly manged in the bread and wine of the Sacrament of the Altar. **I must say**, this is one of the things that I think even many miss out on at Christmas time. **I hear about** these great productions that are put on where large crowds come out to see performers act out the Christmas story with touching songs that would rival a Broadway musical. **I hear about** re-creations of the entire city of Bethlehem... **complete with** every detail of life at the time of Christ's birth... **and a** living nativity scene with real animals... **and Joseph** and Mary with Jesus represented by a real baby.

All of this, I would guess, is meant to make you feel like you're really there... **as if** you experienced the real presence of the Christ-child. **But, of course**, it's all pretend. **It's just a** representation... **a show. That may have** some limited value. **But it is not** of much greater value to literally and truly experience the real presence of Christ on Christmas?

We don't have live animals... **but we** do have the living Jesus here...**and not** just some representation... **but the** real thing. **He is really** there on the altar in Holy Communion... **the actual** living nativity for you to kneel down before... **just as** the shepherds did. **The bread and** the wine are His manger in which His Body and Blood are truly present to bring to you all of the blessings of this holy night. **The name "Bethlehem"** means **"house of bread."** **We don't have** to re-create the place where our Lord was born. **You are in** Bethlehem now. **For He who** is the Living Bread from Heaven comes down to make this place a house of bread... **to satisfy** your spiritual hunger and to fill you with His life.

This is what Biblical-Sacramental theology is all about. **It is about** certainty and comfort. **Baptism is where** Christ's Word and Promise are poured out to touch you and make you His own! So that you know He is real and He has saved you! **His Supper is** where our Lord Promises His Body and blood are in-with-and under the bread and wine...**so that** He Himself may touch you...**Christ...the Very** Son of God crosses time and eternity to assure...**to make** you certain that you are indeed forgiven...**you are** His and you have a place in His Kingdom! **The wonderful mystery** of the Son of God in the flesh remains...**He has** not just come once a long time ago to accomplish what God has Promised...**but this** Christ...**in the** flesh remains with His people...**sharing all** He has!

Let us with Mary keep and ponder all these things in our heart in penitent faith. **And let us** with the shepherds glorify and praise God for all the things which we have heard and seen in Christ... **just as** it has been told to us. In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit ..Amen

Christmas Eve, 2007

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