

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Sunday after Christmas, January 1, 2017

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 76, 79, 87, 89, 92.

Lessons: Isaiah 9:1-7, Hebrews 2:1-15, John 1:1-14.

Sermon Text: Hebrews 2:14-18.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Is it over now? Is Christmas all done? We've had our traditional Christmas worship services. Our children have had the chance to tell us the history of Jesus' birth again. You've probably all had your family Christmas celebrations, too. So it's over now, isn't it?

Perhaps you, too, have seen Christmas trees out on the boulevard waiting for the garbage man or the recycling truck on December 26. That's sometimes the way people get rid of their Christmas decorations immediately after Christmas Day has passed. Stores have already taken down their special "holiday" decorations.

But is it really over now? The message of Christmas should never be really over in the heart of a Christian. The message of the baby born in Bethlehem to the Virgin as it is celebrated in the church year calendar just shouldn't end. First, Christians have Epiphany, celebrated as the "Christmas of the Gentiles" on January 6, which happens to be next Sunday. That is sometimes spoken of as 'the twelfth day of Christmas'. Then there is the Epiphany season itself, which takes us up to Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Lenten season. And the beginning of the Lenten season is determined by the date of Easter, which is related to the Jewish Passover festival, and is set by the spring solstice calendar. (Page 158 in our hymnal talks about the date of Easter.) Do you remember that Jesus was crucified at the time of Passover?

Today, as we still have very much in our minds the birth of Jesus, God's Son, as a true man, we look at the idea of

WHY JESUS SHARED IN OUR HUMANITY

- 1. He did this to free us from death and the fear of death.**
- 2. He did this to break the power of Satan over us,**
- 3. Atoning for all our sins.**

So is Christmas all over? No. It is not all over. At least it shouldn't be. Christmas was only a week ago, and as God's children, we should remember Jesus Christ every day of our lives, and especially remember and give thanks for what he did for us.

Our text reminds us why Jesus came to earth. Exactly what time of year he was born we don't actually know, but the day has been celebrated at this time of year for many, many centuries.

Our text tells us that "*Since the children have flesh and blood, he too [that is, Jesus] shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*"

God made us children of God by working faith in us. "*For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*" Galatians 3:26-27 (KJV)

God made Jesus Christ our brother. He shared in our humanity, and still shares it, sitting at the right hand of God waiting to come to judge the living and the dead.

God had made it clear that ***“the soul that sinneth, it shall die.”*** Ezekiel 18:4 (KJV) And as much as we may not want to admit that, we are all sinners, soul and body. Not only have we inherited sin from Adam and Eve, but we also go about sinning daily in thought, word, and deed.

And Jesus shared that humanity – with one exception. He did not sin. He, although a true human, remains the sinless Son of God.

The writer to the Hebrews makes that clear a few verses later, when talking about the sacrifice that Jesus made as our great high priest: ***“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.”*** Hebrews 4:15 (NIV) Though he is true man, he was without sin!

Jesus, with the exception of sin, took upon himself and joined to his divine nature the flesh and blood of a true human nature. By his incarnation he became a true man according to body and soul.

His sharing our humanity was complete. He did things which are normal actions for human beings. He was hungry, he slept, he wept, he got thirsty, he suffered pain and he finally died.

This made it possible for Christ to put the devil, who had the power over death, out of commission, to crush him, to render him powerless. This Christ did through his own death. By laying down his life as the price of ransom for the transgressions of the whole world, he destroyed the power of the devil. In this way he liberated and released from their terrible slavery all men, who had been kept in bondage, held firmly chained during their entire earthly life through their fear of death. We have here, on the one hand, a picture of the natural lot and condition of all men. They are kept in the most miserable and shameful bondage by Satan. By bringing sins to the remembrance of the people, by appearing as the constant accuser of all men, Satan creates in them the fear of the punishment of death. Without the certainty of Christ’s redemption, fear is found in every man’s heart by nature. And the person who knows nothing of Christ’s atoning death or will not accept the fact of his redemption through the blood of Jesus, has only one fate to look forward to, namely, that of everlasting damnation, in an endless, horrible dying. On the other hand, Christ came to redeem us.

Jesus Christ became human for two specific reasons which we read about here.

First, he did this ***“so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil.”*** He made the devil powerless or ineffective.

Think of the fear that people have of death. Death was the hold the devil had over man. Only God controls death absolutely, determining who is to die and when. But in bringing sin into the world, the devil brought death on earth and death in hell as the result, as the wages of sin. As long as he can keep man sinning, he can demand that this horrible wage be paid. And what is the result for the sinner? Lifelong slavery spent cringing in fear as Satan cracks death’s whip.

But this is no longer the case. Jesus, our brother, has nullified the devil’s power and neutralized his ultimate weapon of death. To accomplish this he ***“shared in our inheritance.”*** He took on our flesh and blood so that he might die and with his holy death free us from our bondage. Jesus used that very thing with which Satan was bullying and beating up man to defeat Satan. Like some vicious dog Satan has been chained, and if some still die of his rabid bite, it is because they have strayed too close to him and too far away from the Prince of Life. Jesus died, yes. But he did something more, which no human except him was ever able to do. He also came back to life, rising from the dead on the third day.

Through his death and resurrection Jesus put out of commission the one who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and liberated those who through fear of death throughout their entire life were subject to bondage. Christ has freed all ***“those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”***

What else did Christ accomplish? Using terminology his readers as "Abraham's descendants" could easily understand, the author described Christ as "a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God." Only in the book of Hebrews is Jesus called "high priest," and what a high priest he was! Toward his brethren he was merciful, feeling their needs and rising to meet them fully. Toward God he was faithful in service, doing everything that God required, carrying out his Father's will in unswerving obedience even when it meant suffering and death.

“For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to

God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”

As a merciful and faithful high priest, he made atonement for sin.

"Atonement" was a word well known to Jewish readers. It took them back to the Old Testament, to that great day of Atonement, the one day each year, when the high priest entered behind the curtain in the temple to sprinkle the animal blood on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. This symbolized the removal of sin and, as a result, peace with God. This is the peace the angels sang of at Jesus' birth: ***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”*** Luke 2:14 (KJV)

Now when we look at Jesus Christ, our high priest, we must realize that the blood he sprinkles is his own. It's not just symbolic, but it is the holy, precious blood of the Son of God. It is powerful enough to remove sin's deepest stain and to bring about true and complete atonement by satisfying God's wrath over sin forever. Jesus did not bring such help for the sinless and deathless angels, but for sinful and mortal man.

With the words ***"Abraham's descendants"*** and ***"the people"*** the author was referring to Israel since his readers were Jewish and descendants of those to whom the ancient promise of salvation had been given. But this does not deny the fact that Christ also paid for the sins of the Gentiles. For if Israel needed such a high priest, so does all the rest of mankind.

We see here a picture of wonderful comfort. Whoever looks upon Christ in true faith as his Redeemer knows that the power of the devil is broken, and that death, formerly the strongest weapon in the hands of Satan to intimidate men and keep them in his power, has lost its terrors. We are liberated, released, redeemed through the atoning work of our Substitute, Jesus Christ. That is still the meaning of Christ's career for us a week after celebrating his birth – and forever! This redemption was possible on account of the fact that the Son of God, while still in the bosom of the Father, became our flesh and blood.

Although Jesus in his sinless life experienced every temptation facing men, including also actually dying, his death was not the complete and final separation from God's grace, but a step in his divinely appointed career. Death was not something inflicted on him against his will, but a means by which he consciously accomplished his calling and anointing as Savior.

That is why Jesus came to earth. The Scripture says: ***“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.”*** Galatians 4:4-7 (NIV)

So the day of Christmas may be past. But the message of Christmas is never something that should be forgotten.

May we remember that Jesus Christ came to earth to redeem us and all mankind from sin, death, and eternal damnation. May we all believe this so that we may live with him in heaven forever. Amen.