

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Christmas Day, December 25, 2022

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 82, 79, 100, 85:1-12, 85:13-15.
Lessons: Isaiah 9:6-7; 1 John 3:1-5; Matthew 1:18-23
Text: Luke 2:1-14 (NIV)
Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

When we are happy we feel like singing. That's how we feel on Christmas morning. We want to tell our fellow believers, ***“Come rejoicing, Praises voicing, Christmas Day is breaking.”*** (*The Lutheran Hymnal: 82:1*) We feel like singing the praises of our God, and so we say with the Christian poet,

***“Praise God the Lord,
ye sons of men,
Before His highest throne;
Today He opens heav'n again
And gives us His own Son.”*** (*The Lutheran Hymnal: 105:1*)

Yes, that's what Christmas is all about: God opens heaven again; there is hope for all poor sinners, for God has given us his own dear Son for our salvation. Therefore, on this Christmas Day we want to think about:

WHY WE SHOULD PRAISE THE LORD AT CHRISTMAS TIME

- 1. Because God's promises were fulfilled;**
- 2. Because our Lord Jesus humbled himself for our sakes;**
- 3. Because the Lord has given us good news of great joy.**

The Christmas Gospel begins with these well-known words, ***“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.”*** When the Holy Spirit moved Luke to record the birth of Christ, he did not simply supply a few simple words that Jesus was born. The Holy Spirit moved Luke to record a number of detailed facts concerning Jesus' birth. The first is that Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor, made a decree that affected the entire Roman world over which he ruled. The purpose of the decree was twofold: a census was to be taken, and while the people were recording their names for the census, they also paid a tax to the Roman Empire. It is also mentioned that Quirinius was the governor of Syria. Judea where Bethlehem was located was a part of Syria.

Why are these detailed facts so important? For this reason that this is how the Lord directed the affairs of this world to bring about the birth of his Son at Bethlehem as the Scriptures foretold. Our text tells us, ***“So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.”*** This fulfilled the prophecy of the prophet Micah who wrote, ***“But you, Bethlehem Ephratha, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from days of eternity,”*** Micah 5:2. The Gospel of John also shows that the people knew that the coming Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. ***“Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?”*** John 7:42. So we see how the Lord controls the world events and directs the rulers of the world in such a way that all

things work out according to his plan for mankind. He caused the birth of Jesus to take place in Bethlehem, as foretold.

What an unusual set of circumstances when Jesus was born! Joseph and Mary were not married and were not living together as man and wife. They were engaged to be married. Yet, Mary was going to have a baby! The virgin was with child! This was in fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah's words, "*The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel,*" Isaiah 7:14. Joseph had been informed by the angel of the Lord how Mary, a virgin, would have a child. "*Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins,*" Matthew 1:20-21. Mary was going to have a child because of a wonderful miracle performed by God.

When all the prophecies had been fulfilled and when all the world conditions were just right, then God caused his Son to be born. This was the right time for Jesus' birth, the time that God had planned from eternity. This is what Paul means when he writes, "*When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman.*" Galatians 4:4.

For this reason we are rejoicing and praising God today, for his Word was fulfilled as the prophets had foretold. We praise the Lord because he kept his promise of salvation given to the people of the Old Testament times. God promised a Savior, and he kept his promise. This is our Christmas joy, as we learn that God's Word is always reliable. We can with the same joyful confidence believe everything that God says in the Bible about our salvation in Christ.

Another reason why we want to praise the Lord at Christmas time is that **the Lord Jesus humbled himself for our sakes.**

2.

Our text tells us what happened at Bethlehem. "*While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in strips of cloth and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*" The humiliation of Jesus was not only that he was born as a true man, but rather the humble circumstances surrounding his birth. Joseph and Mary, tired after their long, hard journey from Nazareth, were concerned about the imminent birth of the baby Jesus. They looked for a place of lodging, but because many people were in Bethlehem for the same reason they were, there was no place for them in the inn. So they took refuge in a stable and here Jesus was born. Mary and Joseph were very poor and did not have the money to buy what today would be considered necessities for the birth of a child. No hospital, no doctors and nurses in attendance, no new beautiful blanket in which to wrap the baby. Mary wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger in the straw.

This was indeed deep humility. This was the Lord of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things, the eternal God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, but what a poor and lowly birth! This is also one reason why Paul wrote of Jesus, "*Who, being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being made in human likeness,*" Philippians 2:6-7.

The important thing is that we know why Jesus humbled himself. Paul tells us, "*You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich,*" 2 Corinthians 8:9. So it is that at this Christmas time we do not emphasize the humility of Jesus to provoke sighs of pity for him. Rather we want to emphasize his humility so that we will be filled with wonder, amazement and thanks for the wondrous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. He became poor in that he, the Lord of all, lived in humiliation so that we might be made rich with salvation. He lived as the obedient Servant

of his heavenly Father in order that we might be made rich with the forgiveness of sins he earned for us by his work of redemption. What greater reason could there be for praising the Lord at this Christmas time than Jesus humbling himself to be the Savior of sinners?

There is one more reason for praising the Lord at this Christmas time. It is because **the Lord has given us good news of great joy.**

3.

The first ones to hear the **“good news of great joy”** were the lowly shepherds. **“There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.”** The announcement of the Savior’s birth was made to people who wouldn’t be considered important people in the world. It was made in the most glorious manner. **“An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.”** Who would not be terrified if they received a message from heaven given by a holy angel? We are poor sinners and would shake with fear.

“But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.’” The long-awaited salvation promised by God was now an accomplished fact. The one who was to be called **“Jesus because he will save his people from their sins,”** Matthew 1:21, was born. Should we not, therefore, rejoice today as we celebrate Christmas? We are poor sinners, poor because every day we sin in our thoughts, words and deeds. Our sins had separated us from God, but he sent his one and only Son to reconcile sinners to himself. The Lord Jesus **“is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world,”** 1 John 2:2. Is this not great reason for rejoicing and praising God? We say with Isaiah, **“I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God, For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness,”** Isaiah 61:10. That’s the righteousness Jesus earned for us by his work of redemption. In the pure white robes of Jesus’ righteousness we can stand before the Lord on the Last Day.

After the angel had told the shepherds that they would find the newborn Savior lying in a manger at Bethlehem, **“suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying. ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.’”** Let us also glorify God the Father at this Christmas time for sending a Savior for us. He sent Jesus to make peace between him and sinners so that we can say, **“Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,”** Romans 5:1. Indeed God’s favor did rest upon us. Let us also praise our Savior, for these words of praise belong to our Lord Jesus, as sung by the angels, **“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!** Revelation 5:12. Such praise Jesus should have, for Paul writes, **“God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross,”** Colossians 1:19-20.

At this Christmas time we should think about what Paul calls **“the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus,”** Ephesians 2:7. What a precious Christmas gift we have received! So we sing,

**“My soul, extol God’s great favor,
Bless Him ever for salvation,
Give Him praise and adoration,” Amen.
(The Lutheran Hymnal: 79)**

Revised from a sermon for December 25, 2005.