

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Christmas Day, December 25, 2010

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Hymns: 84, 79, 78, 86, 87.

Lessons: Isaiah 52:7-10, Hebrews 1:1-9, John 1:1-14 or Luke 2:1-20.

Sermon Text: Luke 1:26-38.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Beloved in Christ our Savior:

Christmas is the celebration of an anniversary. Why is the celebration of an anniversary so important? After all, we celebrate anniversaries all the time, on birth dates, wedding dates, and so forth. But then, most anniversaries are quite commonplace. All of us have birth date anniversaries, and most people have wedding anniversaries.

Christmas is a different anniversary celebration. It stands out in a unique way above all other anniversaries. The reason for this is that something happened before Jesus' birth and at Jesus' birth that never happened before or since. What happened before Jesus' birth is that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin. What happened at Jesus' birth is that the eternal God became also a true man, born of the Virgin Mary. Now, that's really something to celebrate!

This great miracle is what prompted an unknown author in the 15th century to write the words of this hymn:

“Child of wonder, virgin born, King of all creation,
On this happy Christmas morn, Come for our salvation!
Were this Child for us not born, We should all be lost, forlorn,
No true hope possessing. Dear Lord Jesus, thanks to Thee
Now and through eternity For this grace and blessing!”
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 78:2.)

Today, as we joyfully sing the Christmas hymns, let us also meditate on:

**A MOST JOYOUS CHRISTMAS TRUTH – JESUS THE VIRGIN’S SON,
WAS CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

- 1. We want to learn first: what this truth meant to Joseph; and,**
- 2. Second, what it should mean to us.**

Matthew’s Gospel tells us: *“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.”* Mary of Nazareth in Galilee had given Joseph, a carpenter of Nazareth, a promise to become his bride. According to the promise they had made to each other, Mary and Joseph were now husband and wife in the eyes of God. But they were not yet living together as man and wife. As a rule, some time elapsed before the wedding was celebrated and the man took his bride home to live with her. It was during this time that Mary conceived a child. The baby was conceived, not in the normal way by sexual cohabitation, but by the miraculous act of the Holy Spirit.

This was no surprise to Mary, for the Lord sent the angel Gabriel to Mary six months after Elizabeth became pregnant with John the Baptist, and told her: *“You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to*

give him the name Jesus." Luke 1:31. When Mary asked the angel how this could be, since she was a virgin, *"The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.""* Luke 1:35-37. So Mary's pregnancy was no surprise to her.

But Joseph did not yet know all these things from the Lord. The only conclusion he could draw was that his espoused wife had been unfaithful to him. In such a case the bond of betrothal would be canceled. So our text says *"Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly."* Note that Joseph is called Mary's husband before they lived together in married life because of the pledge of betrothal they had made to each other. Joseph, our text says, was *"a righteous man,"* one who strictly observed God's Word regarding the faithfulness of a man and his wife. Yet he did not want to expose Mary publicly to shame and humiliation, and therefore wanted to divorce her quietly.

Think, then, of what it meant to Joseph when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and told him about the wonderful miracle! He told Joseph: *"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."* Mary was with child before they lived together. Yet, Joseph did not have to feel humiliated or be afraid of taking Mary as his wife, for the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Think of what Joseph was to believe according to the Angel's words! He was to accept something as a fact that was contrary to all human knowledge, something that is a biological impossibility! But Joseph did believe! Our text says: *"When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus."* Joseph obeyed and took Mary as his wife but he did not consummate the marriage by sexual union until after Jesus was born. Whether or not Joseph and Mary had children after that is a question not clearly answered in Scripture.

What the angel told Joseph has become an article of faith for all Christians which we confess in the Apostolic Creed. We want to consider this morning what this Bible truth means to us as we hear the rest of the angel's message to Joseph and what it has to do with our salvation.

2.

First of all, we hear something that greatly strengthens our faith in the trust we put in the Bible as God's Word. We read in our text: *"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' which means, 'God with us.'"* What God through the prophet Isaiah had spoken about the virgin conceiving and bearing a child was fulfilled. What God said would happen did happen, even though He had foretold it 700 years in advance! From this fact this conclusion must be drawn: What the Bible says is the holy, unchangeable Word of God. This is abundant reason for us to put our full confidence in it.

Let us now consider what the precious Christmas truth means to us when we are told in the Bible that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. Perhaps we can best learn by means of comparison. If Jesus had been conceived by Joseph and if Jesus had then been born in the natural way as a child of Joseph and Mary, He would have been just an ordinary man, simply a human being like all the rest of us. That means He would then have been included with the rest of mankind of whom the Bible says: *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* Rom. 3:23. Then such a sinner could not have been our Savior from sin, for he would himself need a Savior. Then celebrating Christmas would have been no different than observing the birthdays of Washington and Lincoln. Then, as the poet wrote, we should be "lost" and "forlorn". We would still be in our sins. We would have to pay for them with everlasting punishment in hell as our lot in eternity.

But this we need not fear now, for Jesus is the eternal Son of God. As John says, *"He was with God in the*

beginning." John 1:2 He is the eternal Word and John says: *"The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."* John 1:14. That's why Paul wrote: *"Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body."* I Tim. 3:16. *"God was manifest in the flesh."* (King James Version)

This God-Man is absolutely holy, without the slightest stain of sin. The Book of Hebrews describes Him as *"one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens."* 7:26. This is why Jesus could do what no mere man can do. He could face His bitterest enemies and ask them: *"Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?"* John 8:46. This is all in agreement with what the angel told the virgin: *"The holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."* Luke 1:35

Now consider the importance of the names Jesus is given in our text. When the virgin Mary gave birth to her Child, He would be given a special name. Our text says: *"They will call him Immanuel - which means, 'God with us.'"* *"They"* includes not only Mary and Joseph, but all Christians. We who believe on Him as our Lord call Him Immanuel. We believe that in the person of Jesus Christ God is with us. He came to be with us for a very special reason - to be our Savior. The angel told Mary: *"You are to give him the name Jesus."* Luke 1:31. Later the angel told Joseph the same thing and gave the meaning of the name Jesus. *"You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."* Matthew 1:21. Jesus, then, means Savior.

This is what Christmas is all about! The eternal God also became a true Man. He came to be with us as our Immanuel in order to save us from our sins. If a stranger came to this earth and observed how most people celebrate Christmas, he would never guess that it was the celebration of the Savior's birth. And if we were to go according to the way Jesus is thought of and spoken of in the world today, we would not know how to celebrate Christmas. For Jesus did not come to make allowances for sin, so that all manner of sin may be tolerated; He came to make atonement for sin. He was born as a man so He could give His body and shed His blood on the cross. He was born as a man so that He could take our place under the Law and then redeem us from the Law's condemnation by living a perfectly sinless life. He was born to die for our sins, and then rise again so that God the Father might declare in His Word. *"He ... was raised to life for our justification."* Rom. 4:25. Jesus rose again from the dead so that He might fulfill this promise: *"Because I live, you also will live."* John 14:19

Let us, then, remember on this Christmas Day that all this became possible and was done for us because Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was born as the holy Son of the virgin Mary to be our Savior from sin. Let us not celebrate Christmas in a thoughtless, sentimental way, simply never going beyond the thought of a cute little baby in a manger. Let us, rather, celebrate by remembering the precious good news: Jesus was born to be my Savior from sin and win for me eternal life in heaven. Let us rejoice in Immanuel - "God with us." Let us rejoice in Jesus, for the Bible says: *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."* Acts 4:12

Oh, let us joyfully trust in Jesus and sing His praises! Amen.

(First preached Christmas 1984)