

Christmas Eve Midnight
(11:00pm) Messiah Lutheran Church
December 24, 2008
Luke 2:1-20

In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Here arrived a husband and wife. Pregnant and seemingly ready to have her child at any moment I'm pretty sure the innkeeper was thinking he was doing all he could or should do. He allowed Mary and Joseph to bed down with the animals. Rather than give Mary a somewhat respectable place to deliver her child he let her use the straw. But it's not like he didn't do anything for them! He gave them a place! It's sort of like putting the manger scene in the corner of the house so there is plenty of room for our Grinch figurines and Frosty the Snowman blow up displays. It's kinda like spending hundreds of dollars online at Apple.Com or Cabela's for folks who are stuffed full and then donating a couple of dollars on-line before logging off the computer.

How ironic it is. Christ's life began just as it ended. Foxes have holes. Birds have nests. Yet the Son of Man has no places in all of creation to lay His head. The Creator of our world, the Giver of Eternal life, our Savior began His suffering at the very moment of birth. For as the innkeeper did and we do to, we only think of ourselves. We try and make ourselves feel good by doing at least a little bit. Just as the inn-keeper

was probably able to quiet his conscience a bit by putting a young pregnant mother in the stable (not leaving her and Joseph on the streets) we try and make our consciences feel good when we offer the crumbs to those who have less or none at all, but deep down our guts know it is never enough.

Let us repent of our sins. It seems to happen every year. We get caught up in the moment and the spirit of the season. Even those years when things are difficult. We scrounge for ourselves, families, and friends so that they can have everything they want. And what spirit have we been caught up in? Has it been the spirit of Jose' or Jack Daniels? Or maybe it is the spirit of that poor angel Clarence in It's A Wonderful Life who has to work so that he can earn his angel wings? Or my favorite Christmas time book and play, A Christmas Carol. Is Christmas for us like the Christmas past, present, and future of Ebenezer Scrooge before crying out on his knees? The sad reality is that we have not kept Jesus at the center of our lives. We have wanted Christmas to be about family, about helping people, about feeling good. But Christmas is about Jesus! It is about His death and resurrection. That is why He had to be born, you see, so that He could die, for you, me, and all mankind.

Repent then. But as you sorrow and grieve over your sins for not loving the Lord with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your soul, and not loving your neighbor as yourself do not despair. Be full of joy and peace.

All you, beneath your heavy load,
By care and guilt bent low,
Who toil along a dreary way
With painful steps and slow:
Look up, for golden is the hour,
Come swiftly on the wing,
The Prince was born to bring you peace;
Of Him the angels sing. LSB 366

For the Prince was born to be a sacrifice for your sins. That by faith you might once again belong to Him. He took on the flesh of Mary so that He would bare the scars in His hands, feet, and side that you should bare yourself. He laid in the feeding trough that He might feed you with the Bread that satisfies the soul. He was born to die, be buried, and rise again – for you!

That is worth staying up this late at night. Jesus slept in that manger, suffered the neglect of men, so that He could be nailed to the tree and draw you to Himself in forgiveness. He did it all for you, as though you individually were the only one He loved. He was glad to do it. He doesn't hold any grudge for giving up His life. He did it on purpose. He did it because He loves you.

Bruise for me that serpent's head
That, set free from doubt and dread,
I may cling to You in faith,

Safely kept through life and death. LSB 352

He did it to stop all of the wrath and anger. He was born amongst the animals. He was forsaken in His own home town. He was betrayed by His own followers. He was beaten, rejected, and crucified. He was stricken, smitten, and afflicted. All in order that His Father would love you. He paid the price, that tiny Baby. Justice has been served; the verdict has been handed down. His righteousness exchanged for your unrighteousness. He is glad that He could do it. He got us back from the grips of Satan and Hell. That is why the angels sing of peace and the shepherds leave their flocks in the open field.

Jesus still comes to His people. This Gospel lesson shows us how God comes to us. He comes in the flesh, as the Divine Man. Here he comes to you clothed in humility. Here you find Him wrapped in the sacred Scriptures. Here you will find Him in, with, and under the bread and wine. As the angels gave a sign to the shepherds, **and this will be a sign for you; you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger.** And this will be a sign for you: You will find Him present at the Waters of Baptism, in the mouth of the pastor; you will find Him placed on your tongue this night in His Body and Blood through the bread and wine. You will find Him cleansing you and purify you by His gifts of Grace! He comes to you in humble means, gentle, and lowly, so that we might receive Him as our Savior! He comes with forgiveness to give you peace.

God dwells with us in darkness
And makes the night as day;
Yet we resist the brightness
And turn from God away.
But grace does not forsake us,
However far we run.
God claims us still as children
Through Mary's infant Son. LSB 337

Here in the Church, in the Lord's Supper, in the Absolution, in Baptism, and the Word, the search for Jesus, for peace that the world never seems to find, for Christmas, for the meaning of life, for hope and strength and joy and fullness ends here. Here is the place to lay your head. To rest and to be safe. To have what Jesus was denied so that you would be rich in Him you have it here. Go to where you have certainty not out in the world of what ifs and what not. For you know that here, because of His sure Word, that the Savior of the Nations forgives you. He feeds you. He gives you His life.

Though our sinful nature seeks to shut out Jesus, God has room for you. There is room, for innkeepers and for those who want all earthly goods to themselves. There is room for you, sinners. And there always will be. Your past is forgotten. You are perfect in the sight of your King by His own royal and angelic announcement. **Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all**

**people; for today in the city of David there has been
born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**

Merry Christmas! In † Jesus name.
Amen.