

Sermon for December 25, 2024 – Christmas Day

John 1:1-5, 9-14 (EHV)

Theme: What Child is this?

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him everything was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. ⁵ The light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁹ The real light that shines on everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, yet his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. ¹³ They were born, not of blood, or of the desire of the flesh, or of a husband's will, but born of God. ¹⁴ The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

It is the story of humanity. It has happened at least 8 billion times in our generation and billions of times more throughout history, yet for each individual involved, it is a small miracle.

It is the story of birth. A mother holds her newborn. He is so small and weak. The newborn does not even have full control over his body. His muscles are not fully developed. He cannot speak. The baby is in so much need. His parents must nourish, strengthen, clothe, and protect it.

As the mother gazes at her child, she loves him immensely. So many discoveries lie in the years ahead. What will this child's personality be? Who will this child become? It is the story of our human race — the story of our birth.

Can you recall the birth of your children? Can you remember holding your infant son or daughter for the first time? They felt so fragile in your hands that you feared you might break them. As you held them, do you remember wondering who they would become?

Mary and Joseph must have felt these emotions as they held baby Jesus, with one big exception: they already knew who this child was. They knew that His birth was a genuine miracle of miracles – not only because Mary was a virgin but because of the extraordinary identity of the child that she held in her arms.

It's a paradox that seems beyond belief, yet those who believe have the right to be called children of God. Let us consider the baby in Mary's arms under the theme: **What child is this?**

Our sermon text begins: *¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning.* Who or what is the Word? The Word is Jesus. He is the one to whom all Scripture testifies.ⁱ Only he can reveal the LORD to us.ⁱⁱ Jesus is the Word of God who not only was with God from the beginning but is, in fact, God himself.

³ *Through him everything was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made.* Jesus is the all-powerful LORD. Think about how majestic God's creation is: the billions upon billions of stars and galaxies that fill our unfillable universe. Consider how our powerful sun is only like a mere molecule compared to the vastness of space. Think about the infinite wisdom and power that went into creating and sustaining the cosmos.

Now, think about the baby in Mary's arms. What a paradox! The Creator of all is born a baby. The all-powerful God is not able to keep his little human arms from flailing around. The One who knows everything is unable to speak. The Helper of all is helpless. Mary did not have to wonder what her child would become because she knew who he was right now: her Immanuel (God with us).

John writes: ⁴ *In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind.* ⁵ *The light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* Can you imagine the joy mingled with fear Mary and Joseph had when they held Jesus in their arms? It is nerve-wracking enough to hold your first child, fearing that you might break them. But Joseph and Mary were not just holding any child; they were holding their Messiah; they were cradling their God.

Mary and Joseph understood that their precious Jesus was their Saviour. They knew he was the revelation of God's love to the world. They understood that he was the eternal Author of Life, sent to earth by God the Father to win everlasting life for all condemned to everlasting death because of their sins. Mary and Joseph believed these profound truths about Jesus because God revealed them through the angel Gabriel's message to them.

We also rejoice in knowing who Jesus is. We understand that He is the full revelation of God and His love. We know that he came to win righteousness for us by living a life of perfect obedience to God's law. We know that he came to die on the cross in payment for our sins and rise from the dead to open the gates of heaven for us. He came to shine the light of his grace and mercy upon all humanity: upon everyone living in the darkness of sinful ignorance and unbelief. He came to reconcile us to God.

We understand these things only because the Holy Spirit opened our hearts to believe these scriptural truths. Sadly, not everyone receives Jesus in faith. Most people still live in darkness. Lost in sin and unbelief, most do not grasp the significance of what God did at Christmas, namely that:

⁹ *The real light that shines on everyone was coming into the world.* ¹⁰ *He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not recognize him.* ¹¹ *He came to what was his own, yet his own people did not accept him.*

Most people vaguely know that Christmas has to do with the birth of Jesus. They call it the Christian tradition of Christmas. Even with the holidays' secularization, we can still find manger scenes in public view and images of Mary and Jesus on our postage stamps. The message is there, but the world fails to comprehend it. The world cannot come to grips with the fact that a helpless baby born around 2000 years ago is its God. It seems like utter foolishness. The world rejects such a concept of a Saviour, much like Jesus' own people rejected him.

Yes, God's chosen nation, to whom the sacred promises and prophecies regarding the coming Christ were entrusted, by and large, rejected him. Why? Was it because Jesus failed to fulfill the promises of Scripture? No, He fulfilled every one of them perfectly. Rather, it was because the people did not want to believe that this poor, common man, who looked no different from any other man, could be their almighty God.

¹² But to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. ¹³ They were born, not of blood, or of the desire of the flesh, or of a husband's will, but born of God. There is another Christmas miracle to speak about, namely the miracle of faith. Humanly speaking, it seems too much of a paradox to believe that the Creator of all would become a helpless member of His creation. Yet, we believe it because the Bible says it is true. We believe because God has awakened faith in our hearts to receive Jesus. We know that God fulfilled everything he promised concerning our salvation in Christ. We understand this because the Holy Spirit, who was given to us at our baptisms, revealed these truths to us in Scripture. He marks us as reborn children of God.

Let us change the picture slightly from Mary and Joseph holding baby Jesus to God the Father lifting a child into His arms. Can you imagine God the Father lovingly holding and caressing this child - so happy that He smiles, giggles, coos, and laughs with it? Can you picture that wonderful scene? Now, look a little closer at the face of the child. Who is it? It is you!

Jesus was born into this world of a human mother so that we could be born of God. Think again of the paradox: the Son of God became a son of man so that the children of men might become children of God! You are a child of God through faith in Jesus. You have a special loving relationship with Him. When God the Father looks at you, He sees no sin. It has all been removed and crucified with Christ. When God the Father looks at you, He sees His child with whom He is well-pleased. He promises to work in all things for your everlasting benefit. He loves you dearly. You are incredibly special to him.

And don't think that these are just my thoughts; these are God's promises in the Bible! He calls you precious, His saint, and the apple of his eye. Because Christ was born on Christmas, we get to be reborn through the water and the Spirit of Holy Baptism. We get to be born of God!

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This last verse of our text summarizes the essence of Christmas: the eternal Word – the Son, who both is God and reveals God to us – made his dwelling among us. He came to be where we are, so we might go where He is.

When we see Jesus, we see God in all his glory – and what a unique glory it is! It is the glory of being born as a weak baby. It is the glory of being tempted in every way, just like we all are, yet remaining sinless. It is the glory of being rejected and crucified. It is the glory of rising victorious from the grave and opening heaven to all. This is God's way of saying to the world: I love you.

The birth of Jesus: it seemed like it was the story of our humanity. Billions of births have occurred throughout time, but this story is unique and special. Our human minds picture a mother holding her precious, defenceless baby. Yet the eyes of faith see the baby holding, caressing, and comforting both its mother and all of us as well. This is the truth of Christmas. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. John 5:39

ⁱⁱ Cf. John 14:6,9 & Colossians 2:9