

Luke 2:1-17
Christmas Eve
December 24, 2025

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We have spent a lot of time this Advent season (especially in the midweek services of Evening Prayer) meditating upon the incarnate God, incarnate for you, incarnate and glorified... to share that glory *with* you. What perhaps it seemed we overlooked (but, in truth, not so much overlooked, as much as saved for tonight, prefaced by Sunday's sermon that highlighted Original Sin) was our *need* for the incarnation. Yes, we can speak of Christ incarnate *for* you and focus on the benefit... but, if we're not careful, we can speak of the benefit of what we receive without meditating so deeply on the need which desperately requires some benefit in the first place. You can say all you want to the hearer, "You benefit," but if the hearer doesn't consider himself *needing* the benefit, then it may not even seem that much of a benefit. So, if we do not recognize the weight of Sin, why would we be impressed by and grateful for the Savior?

As Lutherans who know their doctrine pretty well, we sometimes speak past the *need* and hurry on to the benefit (by grace

alone!). And, on this night of all nights, we'd rather meditate on the angelic host, or the stars in the sky, or the supposed serenity of Bethlehem, or the wonderment of the shepherds or the love of Mary and Joseph for this newborn they swaddle in cloths. But, because the world doesn't recognize its need, it doesn't appreciate the *true* benefit. Or, to say it another way, because the world claims different needs, *felt* needs, it seeks not a *historic* benefit or an *eternal* benefit, but a *felt* benefit, an *imagined* benefit, a "what have you done for me lately" benefit.

In truth, the darkness in which the world was cloaked was not a darkness of the night, but the darkness of death... and the stillness in which the world lay was not the stillness of merely one silent night, but the stillness of separation from God... that eerie silence of separation of God.

If '*the wondrous mystery*' is the incarnation that shows God's glory, isn't it equally true that he comes into an equally incarnate world of sin-laden, *wandering misery*? Thus, just as incarnational as is the Gospel, equally incarnational is that from which we are to be redeemed. We must never imagine "salvation" being merely spiritual, as if eternal perishing and condemnation will never actually be experienced... and if we ever do consider salvation being merely spiritual, we quickly reason it irrelevant to our daily life that is oh-so incarnational.

In other words, why are you here tonight? To momentarily and obligatorily pause to tip your hat to a God that is otherwise irrelevant to your ever-progressing life and its painless perfection that will last evermore and evermore? Or are you here tonight as one whose daily life, whose very incarnational daily life is littered with signs and symptoms and consequences and concerns of a sin-filled life in a sin-broken world that *needs* to know of its true redemption?

Perhaps you've just spent a month shopping for toys that will be broken in a week; perhaps you're hoping that Christmas sentimentalities and holiday cheer will magically correct a troubled marriage or family friction? Perhaps you can't see any use for joy when, in your loneliness, you have no one to share it with. Perhaps you're praying that this Christmas will distract you from a recent health diagnosis, or perhaps you want to really enjoy this Christmas because you're not sure if it may be your last... or perhaps you can't feel any joy this Christmas because it's your first without a loved one.

All of these are very incarnational signs and symptoms and consequences and concerns of a sin-filled life in a sin-broken world, aren't they? Daily bread that breaks and rots and decays... a marriage and family that struggles and, in its struggles, doesn't sense any 'glowing echo' of attempting to mirror Christ and the Church filled with the beloved children of God... a deep loneliness that even God himself recognized when he said, "It is not good for man to be

alone”... a life that God himself has said that after 70 years or 80, and certainly not more than 120, it will return to the dust... the grief of living in this broken world with that sting of death Jesus himself knew when he wept at the tomb of his dear friend.

And yet, when these very real signs and symptoms and consequences and concerns are incarnationally so all-consuming in daily life, we might accidentally turn them into a *felt* need – “Lord, just fix this or answer that, and then I’ll be fine.” No, you won’t. These are the incarnational signs and symptoms and consequences and concerns of a much deeper darkness, a stillness of a much stronger separation. This is what *sin* does to the real world. This is how ‘incarnational’ sin is! It’s how *relevant* that theological term is to daily life, how *tangible* it is in daily life. That you know all these signs and symptoms to be true is not so because God somehow poorly designed the world, nor because the world is somehow in the process of randomly designing itself, nor because you yourself have sinned in a way God is punishing because you’ve personally ruined an otherwise perfect and beautiful world! Rather, all these signs and symptoms are tangibly present in daily life because doctrine is not a matter of textbooks, but it’s a matter of history (Genesis 3), but also a matter of daily life... and so, sin is not a matter of theory, but a matter of incarnate truth – *spiritual* to be sure!, just as God is spirit and breathed into Adam the spirit of life, so that man *is* spiritual! You are a spiritual being! Yes, sin is spiritual to be sure; the Fall is

spiritual, to be sure; the world's sinful brokenness is spiritual, to be sure; but spiritual doesn't mean "make believe" any more than you as a being are make-believe... for the spiritual we speak of plays out in incarnate truth.

And that means, in order for salvation to play out in equally incarnate truth, the Savior must be incarnate... The one to be substitute sin-bearer, to bring eternal life back to humanity as God created it to be, to bring us out of spiritual dying into spiritual living in unity with God as Adam and Eve in the incarnate beauty of paradise were always meant to be as part of *creation*... to put us back into that incarnationally-spiritual truth, that Savior must be true man, must be incarnate substance, must be flesh and blood.

And so, into a world of darkness – not the darkness of the night, but the darkness of death – and into the stillness in which the world lay (not the stillness of merely one silent night, but that stillness of separation from God)... into *that* history came the Savior, true God from eternity, yet conceived and born true man in history.

Martin Luther famously said it this way, a quote that appears annually in our Christmas Morning bulletin: "The everlasting Father's Son for a manger leaves His throne; The Mighty God, eternal Good, hath clothed Himself in flesh and blood."

And he has done so precisely to bring the incarnate reality of man's sin and eternal death into a *new* incarnate reality of man's salvation and eternal life. Or, to sound more 'personal' about it... he

has done so precisely to bring the incarnate reality of your sin and eternal death into a *new* incarnate reality of your salvation and eternal life. All of sin's signs and symptoms, concerns and consequences will be undone in due time; and they *will* be because the incarnate one who hung on the cross was no mere man, but the God-man... because this sin-laden world needed nothing less than the incarnate God to redeem us. Another famous quote of Luther's Christmas meditations is this image:

"We Christians should know that if God is not in the scale to give it weight, we, on our side, sink to the ground. I mean it this way: if it cannot be said that God died for us, but only a man, we are lost; but if God's death and a dead God lie in the balance, His side goes down and ours goes up like a light and empty scale. Yet He can also readily go up again, or leap out of the scale! But He could not sit on the scale unless He became a man like us, so that it could be called God's dying, God's martyrdom, God's blood, and God's death. For God in His own nature cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is called God's death when the man dies who is one substance or one person with God."

And because this Jesus – in person and substance – is Immanuel, "*God with us*"... because this Jesus is just as truly God as he is truly man, therefore, in incarnate reality, you and I may see all the spiritual truth that would otherwise be lost as mere 'textbook doctrine.' Luther says,

“In his wounds and death, I **see** my sin. In his resurrection, I **see** the victory over sin, death, and the devil. I **see** righteousness and eternal life as well. [Thus,] I want to see and hear nothing except him.”

Yes, desire nothing but to see and hear Jesus. For, he is just as incarnate as you are. His life for yours was just as incarnationally perfect and sin/less as yours is imperfect and *sinful*. And because your Savior is incarnate, therefore your salvation is equally incarnate... to be unveiled in the resurrection and exaltation of your body, to live in life everlasting where there will be no sorrow any more, nor pain any more, nor tears anymore... because in human flesh and blood, there will be no sin anymore.

Until then, daily life continues in this fallen world... but with one difference-maker cemented in human history: the world’s Savior became flesh and blood, that He might sacrifice Himself for you and thereby exalt you with Him in glory. Thus, even now, even as you anticipate the resurrection and your final deliverance, you may live in the certain confidence and joy of salvation, the forgiveness of sin, a clear conscience before God – meaning, He will never forget, forsake, or abandon-to-fear those who cling to Him in the humble God-man, Jesus Christ, who gives you the tangible, incarnate gifts of the Word, Baptism, and the Holy Supper.

Yes, the humble Jesus – the humanity of Jesus – makes God accessible... more than that, makes God approachable ... you may

come to Him as his adopted children, no, *flee* to Him as a dear child runs to his dear father's lap... and you may do so with a clear conscience, confidence in his gentleness, love for his lowly mercy... seen not 'heavenly' in the Father upon His throne, but seen incarnationally in the Child in the manger. Luther says it this way:

"Are you afraid? Then come to him, lying in the lap of the fairest and sweetest maid. You will see how great is the divine goodness, which seeks above all else that you should not despair. Trust him! Trust him! Here is the Child in whom is salvation. To me there is no greater consolation given to mankind than this, that Christ became man, a child, a babe, playing in the lap and at the breasts of his most gracious mother. Who is there whom this sight would not comfort? Now is overcome the power of sin, death, hell, conscience, and guilt, if you come to judge this gurgling Babe and believe that he is come, not to judge you, but to save."

Or, more pithy than Luther, words you just sang at the beginning of the hour:

Softly from his lowly manger
Jesus calls one and all,
"You are safe from danger,
Children, from the sins that grieve you,
You are free! All you need,
I will surely give you."

Are you afraid.. afraid of all the tangible symptoms and consequences of the Fall? – afraid that your marriage is about to

crumble? Then flee to the Child in whom is salvation and all its benefits, including forgiveness of one another, patience for one another, and strength for your marriage. Are you afraid that your family's friction will turn into fracture? Then flee to the Child in whom is salvation and forgiveness sufficient for all, and learn from him humility toward parents and love of tender children. Are you afraid of your daily bread and material stability suddenly failing and decaying? Then flee to the Child who knows His dear Father and has promised you that the Father knows your need and provides all that you need for this body and life. Are you afraid your illness will end in death? Then flee to the Child who was born to die, so that whoever believes in Him, though that Christian die, yet shall he live. Are you afraid of unrelenting grief over the death of your loved one, even as you know that loved one is safe in heaven? Then flee to the Child who is the Lamb, whose heavenly feast joins the Church on earth in mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won.

What room is left for despair for us Christians? Look with joy on your marriage and family, with thanksgiving on your daily bread, with companionship among the communion of saints, with confidence in the face of illness, with certainty over death and the grave, with the fortitude of forgiveness over sin and all the accusation of the devil. In short, what room is left to despair, when Christ has conquered sin, death and darkness... and on account of this One forevermore *in the flesh*, you may mark the day that

celebrates this incarnate truth by gathering at the foot of his pulpit and altar, and by that confession, boldly and joyfully wishing one another, "A blessed Christmas to you!"

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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Calvary Lutheran Church
December 24, 2025