

Trinity Lutheran Church, Gillette, WY
December 23, 2007

Jesus: He is Immanuel

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. The text for the sermon this morning comes from the Gospel, which was read earlier.

The wait is almost over. Soon will be the big day. Everything is falling into place. Everything is going just as planned. Just a little more time of waiting and Mary and Joseph will be married. However, one problem just arose and it's not a small problem either. Mary, Joseph's wife-to-be is pregnant. What's worse: it's not Joseph's Child! There is one thing and one thing only to do: divorce her quietly. While not married technically yet, they were married in the eyes of God because of their betrothal.

For Mary to have sexual relations with another man before she had them with her husband-to-be was inconceivable. The only way to make this right would be to divorce her so that she can become betrothed to the father of her Child and then marry him. Joseph was a righteous and just man. This meant that Joseph was one who observed divine and human laws. Like everyone else, Joseph was far from perfect, but as a child of God he had used the law of God as a rule by which to live his life, to express his thankfulness for God's blessings. Joseph knew what the law of God said about unfaithfulness on the part of a wife, but at the same time he was concerned about the welfare of Mary. He could have brought their situation before the proper authorities and demanded that the law take its course. According to Deuteronomy 22, the life of Mary, and ultimately Jesus, could have been in jeopardy if Joseph had wanted to press the issue;

yet Joseph showed a deep concern for Mary. We see that concern for Mary in that Joseph thought long and hard about what to do, for both his sake and for Mary and the Child.

While considering his options, an angel appeared to him in a dream and told him *“Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”* Here we see how an angel served the Lord while He was still in Mary’s womb. The angel redirected Joseph’s intended course of action. The angel reminded Joseph that he was a son of David. It was implied in those words that if the Savior were to come from David’s line as promised, Mary and he needed to remain together as husband and wife. Joseph was prevented from jumping to any more false conclusions about Mary by being informed about the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit within her. Joseph's unbelief is overcome by a dream, and he takes Mary as wife and assumes the paternity of Jesus. A discomfiting account of what to do with an allegedly unfaithful wife concludes with the birth of the Christ Child, God Himself; Joseph's claiming the Child as his own by naming Him Jesus; and the consummation of a marriage.

Joseph, who once thought about divorcing Mary because of her violation of the Sixth Commandment, now embraces her and the Child to which he is to become the earthly father of.

What was it that caused Joseph from divorcing Mary? It was well within his right to do so according to Old Testament law. But if Joseph had divorced her, something terrible could have happened to her and the Child; death.

The same thing happened to Joseph that happened to John while he sat in prison: doubt of his faith. Joseph knew the prophecies and that one day, the Messiah would be born from the line of David, his family line. Never in his wildest dreams did he ever think that it would be he who would be the progenitor of the Messiah. Because of that, he doubted. He was perplexed that Mary could have sexual relations with a man other than him. He was shocked to hear that she was now with child and it was his. But most of all, he was taken aback that this Child which Mary carried was indeed the promised Messiah.

This child which was given to Joseph and Mary is given to you and me also. It is Jesus, the One who will save us from our sins. It is Immanuel, God with us; here with us in the flesh as true God and true man, who lived an earthly life. Jesus is the New Testament counterpart of Joshua, “the Lord saves.” Just as Joshua led God’s Old Testament people into the promised land of Canaan, so Jesus came into the world to lead His followers to the heavenly Canaan.

This is the true meaning of Christmas. It is not about receiving lots and lots of presents. It is about receiving one gift: Jesus Christ. It is not about receiving Christmas cards. It is about the message which the angel proclaimed to Joseph: *“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”*

Martin Luther, in his Christmas hymn *From Heaven Above to Earth I Come* (LSB 358:8), sums up what Jesus did for us: “You came to share my misery/That You might share Your joy with me.” He came into this world because of our misery. That misery is sin. He came to take away all sin from you and I and all people. Jesus became flesh to

fulfill God's Law and redeem you. He came to live a life of perfect obedience to all of God's commands so that He might be the sinless sacrifice in your place.

Some will say that Christmas is all about receiving. It is more about giving than it is about receiving. It is about God giving to us His one and only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. It is about God giving to us the Savior of our race. It is about God giving to each and every one of us the right to be called sons and daughters of God and be seen through the eyes of God, sinless, because of what His Son has done for us.

But Christmas is also about receiving, though we continue to receive from God each and every day. It is about receiving the greatest gift, the only gift that we could ever need. It is about receiving all that God has to give to us: forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. It is about receiving that gift of Holy Baptism which saves us as Peter says. It is about receiving the very body and blood of Jesus Christ, which strengthens our faith and keeps us in our faith. It is about receiving that Word of God, preached to us, where we hear that we are indeed sinners but that all of our sins have been forgiven.

As we anticipate the coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, we focus on the message of the angel to Joseph: *“that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit...he will save his people from their sins.”* The Lord speaks His saving truth, which remains true even when all appearances point to the contrary. His Word is sure. No matter the humble manger: the Infant born to Mary is your Savior. No matter the ordinary appearance of Word and Sacrament: they still deliver forgiveness, life and salvation. No matter the whispers of the devil, the world and your own sinful flesh: your Savior declares that you are forgiven for all of your sins. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, amen.