

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI

Pastor Mark Gartner

Sermon for Advent 4 and Sunday School Children's Christmas Service – Dec. 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010

### **Matthew 1:21-23**

**“She will give birth to a son, and you will give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. 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.””**

Dear followers of Jesus our true God. Amen

If you really think about it, Christmas is a unique time of the year. All around the world there are hundreds of millions, if not billions of people who, will be celebrating the birthday of the same person. And even though we are saddened by the fact that Christmas has become so commercialized these days, even though there are a lot of people who are more concerned about Christmas sales and Christmas spending and Christmas gifts, still the fact remains that there are lots and lots of people who still know that Christmas is really about the birth of a baby in a manger over two thousand years ago. Isn't that amazing? Isn't it just beyond belief that the birth of one child would create this tidal wave of celebration around the globe? That millions of people would gather to sing songs, give thanks, and exchange gifts in his honor?

Think for just a moment, hypothetically obviously, if you were from another planet, and you landed on earth, and saw and heard all the activities prompted by the birth of this one child, wouldn't you just have to ask, “Who was that kid? What's so special about him?” Actually, you don't have to be from outer space to ask those kinds of questions. There are probably a lot of people in our world, in our community, maybe in our own homes, who find themselves wondering, “Yeah, what is so special about that baby? What's with all the celebrating?” Today, these are the questions we'd like to reflect on for a moment. We'll take as our theme

### **Sermon Theme: Jesus Is With Us!**

- 1. As our God**
- 2. As our Savior**

How many of you know what an oyster looks like. It is a rather ugly looking creature with a rather bland looking exterior. At first glance why would anyone want to touch an oyster? Even more, why would anyone want to opening up that rather ugly looking creature to see the slime and guts of that oyster? Obviously, the reason that people open up that oyster, even with all of its ugliness, is because it contains something very precious and expensive. Inside that rather ugly creature are pearls. On the outside it looks like nothing. On the inside it is something that everyone wants. This is very similar to baby Jesus. The baby Jesus didn't look very special “on the outside” when he entered the world. But Matthew quoting from the book of Isaiah tells us that there is more to the story, **“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel – which means, “God with us.”** When we get to the “inside” of the baby Jesus we see something very precious. This baby is God. This baby was born into this world as the very Son of God. This baby had all the power of God, because he was God. That is why so many people take time out of their busy schedules to gather in God's house to worship the birth of this little baby. They are worshipping their God and Lord.

Let's just sit a minute and let this sink in. Do you grasp the greatness of what we just said – “Jesus is God.” Do you realize that this fact is the real Christmas miracle? The greatest miracle associated with the birth of Christ is not merely that a virgin conceived a child (although that is a miracle). It's not that

angels announced his birth or that a star guided the wise men to his cradle. No, the real miracle, is that in the birth of that child, God became a human being, while still being God. I'll say it again, just in case you missed it. In Jesus, God became man. You realize that goes beyond our ability to comprehend. The more you think about it, the less sense it makes. How could that baby, who couldn't change his own diapers, possibly be at the same time the creator of the universe? But both are true. Scripture says that Jesus was **"born of a woman."** AND **"through him all things were made."** How can that be? Scripture clearly records when he was one day old, when he was 8 days old, 12 years old, 30 years old. And yet, Jesus could also say, **"Before Abraham was, I am."** In other words, Jesus always existed. Jesus is eternal, because he is God." In fact, isn't that what the angels announced on the night of his birth? They said, **"Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."** Check out how the word "Lord" is used throughout the Bible. It's obviously used as the name for God. The angels were announcing the incredible truth, "Today, God is born!" My friends, that's the miracle of the Christmas, that God took on flesh; that God became a man; that that little baby truly was—and still is—Immanuel, that is, God with us.

So what does that mean for our lives today? It means that God cared enough about you and me to come down here in person. To bring this into terms we can understand, we can use the example of the President of the United States. It's one thing to get a recorded phone message from some political worker at the local party headquarters telling us the President appreciates your support. On the other hand, it would be a very big deal to have President Obama come knocking on your door and personally thanked you for your support. Jesus, the very Son of God, stepped into our world, to speak to us, not only for God, but as God. He did more than just "knock on our door". He stepped into our lives in a very personal and loving way as our God.

## 2. As our Savior

And yet, there is even more to the story. Jesus most certainly is God, and don't get me wrong, this is great news. God is with us in the form of the earthly baby, Jesus. But our text this morning expands the picture, **"She will give birth to a son, and you will give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.** Did you catch the very important thing about Jesus' entry into this world? It is contained in his name. The name Jesus means the "one who will save". Jesus came into this world to be more than just a God. He came to be our God who would save us from our sins. He came as the one who would substitute himself for lost sinners.

The question that many people need to ask not only this Christmas season, but every day of the year is, why is it so important that Jesus came to be our Savior from sin? The answer: Because that solves our biggest problem. The greatest problem in our world today is not global warming. It's not the threat of terrorism. It's not health care reform, or the fixing the economy. It's not unemployment or illiteracy or racial discrimination. No, our greatest problem is SIN. And the fact is that no matter how hard we try, we cannot do what God says we should do. Time and time and time again, we prove that we can't be counted on to do what is right. There's always a part of me that thinks, "Me first." Even if it means thumbing my nose at God, or hurting the people I love or shirking my responsibilities at home or work or school. And all of these things leave me feeling guilty and separated from God. For you see, that's what sin does. It separates people from God.

But isn't that where Jesus comes into the picture? Jesus came into this world of sinners specifically to bring us back to God. No, he didn't bring us back to God by showing us how we should be living our lives. Rather, Jesus brought us back to God by, in effect, trading places with us. He took on our sin and guilt and carried it all the way to the cross and was there punished by God for the sins we had committed. And in exchange for our sins, Jesus gave us his holiness. So now that God sees us as holy people in Christ, his arms are open to us and so are the doors of heaven. Isn't that what St. Peter means

when writes in his first epistle, **“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”**

Dear Christian friends, isn't that why there are millions and millions of people gathering to worship that Christ child this Christmas season, namely because this child is the one who deserves our praise. If you think about it, who else in the history of the world has had a greater impact on more people than Jesus Christ? Who else in the history of the world has had a greater impact on your life? Thomas Edison may have given you the light bulb. Bill Gates may have given you the Windows Operating System. Your dad may have given you a love for the outdoors. But really, can you think of one person who has done more for you than the one baby born in a stable? That baby guarantees that you're all right with God. That baby is the proof that God keeps his promises and has a perfect plan for your life. That baby is your assurance that you will never walk alone and that God will cause even trials and tribulations to serve your eternal good.

If you think about it, we have good reason to be here in God's house today celebrating the birthday of his son. When you consider what child this is, it's easy to see why millions still celebrate his birth. What's maybe a little hard to figure out is why millions worship him only at Christmas. Is it because he will stop being Lord and Savior by this Sunday? Is it because he is not longer worthy of our praise after the gifts are all opened? How many of the millions of people celebrating Christmas this year will ultimately be grouped among those who said, “Lord, Lord,” but in the end will hear Jesus say, **“Away from me. I never knew you.”**

Maybe what's really amazing is not how many people come to church on Christmas. Rather, what's really amazing is that in spite of our unfaithfulness, he keeps coming to us. Through the sacrament of the Holy Communion, he renews his covenant with us, assuring us that he's not holding our sins against us. Through his words and promises, he's given us hope for the future, and comfort when we grieve. He gives us the strength to fight the good fight, to run the straight race, and the assurance that when our last day comes, we will be gathered into his arms in heaven.

Isn't that what that little baby means to us? Isn't that why we are here today? Yes, we're here to celebrate his birthday. But we're also here to celebrate what his birthday, his life, his death, his glorious resurrection, as true God and true Man really means for us now and forever. May that be a celebration that never ends! Amen.