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Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY
Christmas Eve
December 24, 2023
Text: Pericope Readings¹

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

“(Mary) will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

Tonight, I would like us to revel and rejoice in the contemplation of who Jesus is. If your life has been anything like mine, these past days and weeks have been very full and very busy. But tonight, I want us all to slow down for a few moments so that we can give prayerful thought to this question, “Who is this Jesus, whose birth we celebrate tonight with such devotion, pageantry, and beauty? Who is He, the One who lies in the lap of the poor young maiden? Yes, He has the appearance and form of an ordinary baby boy. No visible rays of glory play around His friendly face. But what does the angel of the Lord say to the amazed shepherds, “He is Christ the Lord,” and “He will save His people from their sins.” The baby born in Bethlehem’s manger was God the Savior come in human flesh and blood.

“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: (God) was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory” (I Timothy 3:16).

What a wonderful message! The incarnation of God’s Son means God and man are united with this birth. God has become a man; a man has become God! The eternal united with the mortal. The all-powerful joined Himself with powerless dust. Though Jesus was born without sin, He united Himself with sinners. In Jesus, eternal love wedded with a world that hated God. The

¹ A hearty thanks to my forefather in the faith, C.F.W. Walther, from whom the majority of this sermon is taken.

Lord of lords before whom all angels and archangels must bow in worshipful adoration shackled Himself to the citizens of this world who had given themselves over as servants of sin and Satan. He who carries all creation in His hands and has sown the myriads of stars as seed on the field of the firmament, became weak with the weak, helpless with the helpless, and permitted Himself to be lifted and carried by sinful hands: Mary, Joseph, Simeon did so in love; years later, Jesus would be carried along by wicked men who would see Him die by crucifixion.

He whom the heavenly Father in His eternal glory declared to be the image of His essence and the reflection of His glory, the same with Him in divine majesty, became the child of a woman; by so doing, He became a brother of sinners, our brother. Christ took upon Himself the nature of our weak human race. Through our original and actual sin, we deprived ourselves of the nobility and dignity God intended for us from the beginning. He, the eternal light before whom even the light of heaven is darkness, came down into our dark world in order to become a member of the same family with those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14) “which means God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

God with us, not to be our judge, but to be our Savior. He, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, for whom the skies merely serve as His throne and the earth as His footstool, descended in order to make His home among the inhabitants of this world. On Christmas morning, the almighty Christ permitted His name to be enrolled in the list of men as the least and poorest of them. God with us in Christ Jesus.

Oh, great is the mystery of godliness, “God was manifested in the flesh!” What are all God’s miracles compared with this miracle, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14) to be our Savior from sin and everlasting evil? In comparison, what is the miracle of creation? With its countless stars traveling in wonderful order in their orbits? What is the

miracle of the preservation of each and every living and moving being compared with the mystery of godliness? What are all these compared with that miracle, God divested Himself of His divine glory, descended from His throne that stands over all the heavens, took not only the form but also the nature of a creature, a creature that had fallen from Him; God became a man, a man in the form of a servant and a brother of sinners?

Tell me, what language, hymn, song, or poetry has words and wisdom enough to express the importance of such a birth? When the angels gave their praise on Christmas morning, they quickly hurried back into heaven in order to lead the heavens in song that they might celebrate this deed of God before His throne forever and ever. What should we do in light of this wondrous birth? Nothing could be better than to throw ourselves into divine worship to Him who took upon Himself the nature of a man!” Nothing could be more pleasing to God and more fulfilling for your own life than to live day by day in Christian faith confessing Jesus is Lord. (adapted from Walther, *Gospel Sermons*, Vol. 1, p. 42–44)

“And the angel said unto (the shepherds), Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord...¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ¹⁴Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:10–11, 13–14).

We sing tonight “because this miracle of love concerns us most of all. God is love; In this this love of God was made manifest among us that God the Father sent His only Son into the world so that we might live through Him (I John 4:8-9). In love, the Son of God entered our world in poverty and lowliness for He would take upon Himself the misery and guilt of our sin. We are relieved of their oppression forever. When the Son of God descended from heaven and appeared as a citizen of earth, He made this small dwelling place the center of the universe, God’s place upon which He looks with unspeakable love and good will; yes, the walls of heaven now surround earth.

Because of the birth of God's Son and His redemptive ministry of teaching, healing, loving sinners unto repentance and faith, suffering, dying, and rising again, we Christian believers are lifted up from the dust of earth to the throne of God's glory" (Walther, *Gospel Sermons*, Vol. 1, p. 45).

Tonight, we sing and rejoice. We pause in Christian faith to ponder God's Word and the revelation of God revealed in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior. In song, word, and prayer, we give thanks and express our love for Christ Jesus our Savior and our Christian love for one another. Peace, goodwill toward men.

"Great indeed is the mystery of godliness: (God) was manifested in the flesh..." His name is Jesus. Our Lord and Savior, the joy and salvation of all the earth! A Merry Christmas to you all!!

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.