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Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY

First Sunday after Christmas

December 31, 2023

Text: Luke 2:22–40

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

A blessed and Merry Christmas to you all on this 7<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas!!

It's been a joyous time these past few days rejoicing in the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We have sung, prayed, and rejoiced at the wonder and mystery of God being born in the lowly manger of Bethlehem. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us to be our Lord and our Savior. What an amazing and wondrous mystery.

But we must pause to ask a simple question, “Why did the eternal Son of God chose to take upon Himself our human nature by means of being conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary’s virgin womb?” We might expand that question more fully by asking, “Why did God’s Son choose to go through 9 months in His mother’s womb, be born, live in a family, go through infancy, adolescence, and into adulthood?” What I’d like us to ponder for a few moments is not only why God became human but why He chose to live through the entire life cycle of every man, woman, or child.

Today’s reading from Luke 2 helps us. For we see that the 40-day old infant Jesus is taken by His mother and stepfather to Jerusalem in order to complete the required sacrifices prescribes by the Law of Moses. The incarnate Son of God did not skip any of the normal events or requirements placed upon any infant boy of His day. Jesus was circumcised and named on the 8<sup>th</sup> day according to custom and in fulfilment of God’s Law (c.f., Lk. 2:21; Lev. 12:3). As a firstborn Son, Jesus must be presented before the Lord on the 40<sup>th</sup> day of His birth in order to be consecrated to the Lord by blood sacrifice.

Mary too must offer an animal sacrifice for her cleansing. God's Law in Exodus 13 and Leviticus 12 must be fulfilled in order for Christ to be the world's redeemer. We must never forget everything that happened to Jesus and everything He Himself said and did, was for your salvation and for the world's deliverance from sin, evil, and demonic tyranny.

During Christmas, we Christians rejoice in the fact God became flesh and blood in Christ Jesus. But we also rejoice and fill the earth with song and praise because the Savior of the world was conceived, born, lived as an infant, a young boy, an adolescent, and grew into mature adulthood in order to redeem humanity regardless of their particular circumstances of life. The Son of God lived through all the stages of life in order to demonstrate His desire and ability to redeem all of life from conception to grave.

Today's collect – that prayer we pray toward the beginning of the service before the Old Testament reading – beautifully describes what I am saying, “O God, our Maker and Redeemer, You wonderfully created us and in the incarnation of Your Son yet more wondrously restored our human nature.” In the beginning, God the Father created us in His image to be conceived, born, mature and live. God's work of creation is staggeringly beautiful, especially the beauty and wonder of man. And yet, God the Father more wondrously, more gloriously, more majestically restored our fallen human nature through the Incarnation of His beloved Son, Christ Jesus. Through Jesus, the ravages of sin, death, shame, and satanic tyranny are forgiven and healed.

All this took place through the Incarnation of God's Son. Incarnation simply means “enfleshed” or “embodied.” Let's consider the incarnation in more modern terms. God's Son became an embryo and fetus in order to restore more wondrously children in their mother's womb. God was born an infant to restore our human nature during infancy. The infant God grew during adolescent – that transitional period between childhood and mature adulthood in order to restore our human nature as fully developed men and women. And I will hasten to add that Christ Jesus was born into a family in order to redeem and sanctify our families. Such is the importance and significance of

Luke 2:39–40, “And when they (i.e., Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus) had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child (the divine Child, Jesus) grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.” And Luke, 2:52, uses a similar phrase to describe Jesus when He was 12 years old (i.e., an adolescent boy maturing into manhood), “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.” Throughout these years, Jesus was wondrously restoring our human nature.

The epistle text from Galatians 4:4–7 summarizes the redemptive importance of the incarnation of God’s Son:

<sup>4</sup>But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup>to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. <sup>6</sup>And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God” (Galatians 4:4–7).

God’s Son was born of a woman to redeem every man, woman, and child for everyone is born of a woman. God’s Son submitted Himself to the requirements of God’s Law because every human being, believer and unbeliever alike, is held accountable to God’s Law. Christ Jesus submitted Himself to suffering and death not only so that He could be the final sacrifice to atone for the sins of the world but also to sanctify our death. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord (Rev. 14:13). Jesus rested in the tomb for three days to sanctify our rest in the grave. And God be praised, Jesus rose from the dead in order to secure our resurrection from the dead on the Last Day. All joys, all sorrows, all of life is sanctified in Christ. “Because I live, you also will live” (Jn. 14:19).

Our restoration is all the more glorious because everything about us from conception, birth, growth and maturity, marriage, family, daily life, work, play, death, and resurrection to glory is established upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. As Christ Jesus had a body, mind, will, intellect, soul, and

imagination fully sanctified in love and obedience to His heavenly Father, so we too, the baptized of the Lord, bring every action, thought, and intention as well as every area of our lives under the obedience and lordship of Christ Jesus. We Christians live according to God's Law not under compulsion but in love and hope. So whether we live or die, we belong to Jesus as sons and heirs of God in Christ. In Him, our entire human experience is being restored most wondrously.

Is it any wonder then why Simeon in today's reading from Luke 2 rejoices in seeing the infant Jesus! When He picked up the enfleshed Christ, Simeon carried the world's salvation, the light of revelation for Gentiles, and the glory of His people Israel (vs. 32). By faith, Simeon rejoiced and sang in awe and wonder as he held in his arms the redeemer of the world.

Faith in Jesus is the true source and fulfillment of awe, wonder, and delight. Sin and unbelief create staleness, cynicism, and flippancy. When the Holy Spirit creates Christian faith in our hearts and minds, He is restoring our human nature most wondrously so that, like Simeon, we rejoice.

We sing Simeon's Song, the Nunc Dimittis, after receiving the Lord's Supper. For in bread and wine, Christ Jesus has come to us, restoring most wondrously our human nature as He gives us His own divine body and blood. Thus we sing after feasting in the forgiveness of sins:

Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel...

The wonder and delight of Christ Jesus be with you all. For you are most wondrously restored through the full and complete life of Christ Jesus.

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.