

Christ Lutheran Church

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December 2017

In order that we may truly celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas, it is vital that we take to heart His nature as our Savior.

To many people, Jesus was a great man and teacher. They may point to His obviously fair and right teachings about virtue and love: *"Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them"* (Matthew 7:12); *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"* (Matthew 19:19). Or, in a world that is so disturbed by hatred and violence, they may very much admire His words: *"Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5:44-45).

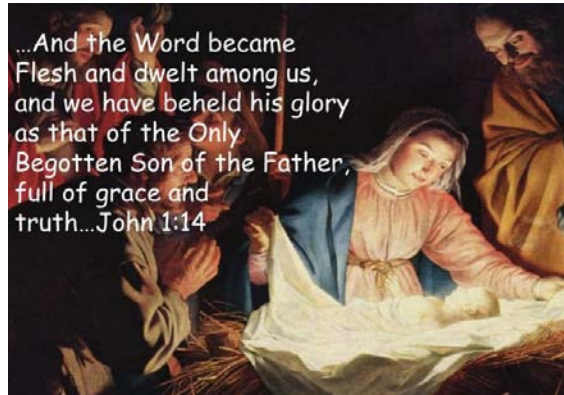
But if all we are to see in Jesus is a great man and teacher, we do not yet have reason to celebrate. For if the baby born that night so long ago in Bethlehem was only to become a great man, He could not help us beyond the grave – any more than any other religious guru in history who has succumbed to the dust with his earthbound teachings.

Nor could Jesus be called a teacher of virtue and love, if He were just a man. But as His enemies pointed out, He would be the worst kind of deceiver. When Jesus pointed to His miracles and claimed to be one with God the Father, they accused Him of lies and blasphemy (John 10:30-33). The same was true when He claimed authority to forgive sins, which only God can do (Luke 5:21); and when He claimed that on the Last Day He would come on the clouds with divine authority to judge all people (Matthew 26:64-65). If Jesus were just a man, His enemies were right; He was guilty of the worst deceit and blasphemy, deserving death. Or at best, He was a deluded fool and no help to us.

If there is to be "higher criticism" over who the baby born at Bethlehem really was, if there is to be a "demythologizing" of the biblical story in an attempt to find spiritual "truths" to apply in our "enlightened" age, we really have lost all reason to celebrate His birth. Either we receive Jesus with all His teachings,

or we lose Him altogether; and in losing Jesus, we lose the Father who sent Him. *"Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either"* (1 John 2:22-23).

But Christ came to give us life with His Father. As the eternal Son of God, He was there in the beginning to create the perfect world (John 1:1-3) where people could live in fellowship with God. But when Adam and Eve fell into sin, it had consequences for all their descendants. For *"through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned"* (Romans 5:12).



The truth is, despite our best intentions, as sinners we are unable to live the perfect life of virtue and love that God commands and Jesus taught. Sin breaks off fellowship and life with God.

But this is why Jesus came. In the greatest miracle of all history, He entered His own creation. *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14).

As the Son of God and Son of Man, Jesus lived the perfect life of virtue and love God's law required of every human. Then He offered His innocent life on the cross to pay for all our sins. And since death could not keep its hold on this God-Man, He rose from the tomb to declare us forgiven and restore us to eternal life with God. For *"as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God"* (John 1:12).

Truly, we have reason to celebrate at Christmas. Not only was Jesus a good man and teacher; He is our eternal God who has become our Brother. He is ever near to comfort and strengthen us by His truth. And one day, He will fill our hearts with perfect peace and joy in His heavenly kingdom.

In His saving truth and love,
Pastor Smith

Jesus is the Highway of Rest

(A newsletter of our Evangelical Lutheran Synod's Board for Home Outreach)



“A voice of one calling: ‘In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it.’” —Isaiah 40: 3, 5

Christmas time is upon us again! Is there anyone who sees it as a restful time? With the holiday program at our child’s school, the company Christmas party, the decorating and cooking, and of course, the shopping for the perfect gift, our pace is hectic. By the time Christmas Day arrives we are breathless. That’s ironic, since Christmas is the way to rest, perfect rest, as God purposed it.

A long time ago God sent a special messenger to remind the people of Israel that Christmas is the way to perfect rest. The messenger’s name was John the Baptist. He lived in the Judean desert, dined on odd holiday fare (locusts and wild honey), and spent his time preaching about Christmas rest. The Bible describes him as, “A voice of one calling: ‘In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it.’”

Considering that we run ourselves breathless, going this way and that, and making little headway in this wilderness, John’s preaching is timely. He preached about the way that brings rest, which he called “a highway for our God.” He said that this way would be revealed for all mankind to see, and it was this: God’s eternal Son was born into the world from the Virgin Mary as the sinless man Jesus Christ. Jesus had come to save all people from their sins, and by doing so, provide the way of perfect rest. John also preached that to catch one’s breath on the “Jesus highway” one needed to prepare.

But don’t worry! This preparation is not another task to be crammed into an already hectic schedule. He was talking about the inner preparation of the heart. John preached about confessing our sinfulness to God (repent) and trusting in Jesus. He also preached how this happens, and it is not through our personal willpower to reprioritize. Rather he said that God gives these gifts to our heart through Scripture and baptism for salvation.

Since God promises to work in our heart through these means, it reminds us of something essential. Before we begin each new week’s rat race, we need to pull off at God’s rest stop, the church. We will hear during Christmas and throughout the year that Jesus is the highway to heaven, and that this is not a hectic expressway of personal achievements, but a way of perfect rest. He came into the world to do for us what we could not do for ourselves: he lived a life of perfect devotion to his heavenly Father and then at 33 years old, he gave his holy life over to hell and death at the cross to forgive all sin. This forgiveness is God’s perfect rest for our conscience that is disturbed about all the times we rushed right past him. Best of all, it promises at the finish of our earthly race the eternal rest stop called heaven.

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
3 <i>Advent 1</i> Worship with Communion 9:30 AM Sunday School & Bible Class 10:45 AM Worship at Crystal Terrace 1:00 PM	4	5	6 CLWMS 5:00 PM Midweek Advent Supper – 5:30 PM Service – 6:30 PM (at the church)	7 Youth Catechism 4:00 PM	1 Jesus Cares Ministry 2:00 PM	2
10 <i>Advent 2</i> Worship with Communion 9:30 AM Voters' Meeting and Potluck After Church Worship at Crystal Terrace 1:00 PM	11 <i>Happy Birthday</i> Steve Karp	12	13 Midweek Advent Supper – 5:30 PM Service – 6:30 PM (at the parsonage)	14 <i>Happy Anniversary</i> Charles & Eva Brumble Youth Catechism 4:00 PM	15	16 <i>Happy Birthday</i> Wally Klein
17 <i>Advent 3</i> Children's Christmas Program 9:30 AM (Refreshments after church) Worship at Crystal Terrace 1:00 PM	18	19	20 Midweek Advent Supper – 5:30 PM Service – 6:30 PM (at the church)	21 <i>Happy Birthday</i> Aspen Smith Youth Catechism 4:00 PM	22	23
24 <i>Christmas Eve</i> Christmas Eve Candlelight Service 6:30 PM	25 <i>Christmas Day</i> Christmas Morning Service 9:30 AM <i>Happy Birthday</i> Adeena Klein	26	27	28 <i>Happy Anniversary</i> Steve & Elizabeth Karp	29	30 <i>Happy Anniversary</i> Michael & Bethany Harrington
31 <i>New Year's Eve</i> Worship 9:30 AM Worship at Crystal Terrace 1:00 PM	 <p style="font-style: italic; font-size: 1.2em;">"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).</p>					

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