



A SAVIOR IS BORN

A Savior Is Born to Change the World

Christmas Eve

BETHEL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH | York, Nebraska

December 24, 2022

SERIES THEME: A SAVIOR IS BORN

The first Christmas sermon was preached to a small congregation consisting entirely of shepherds. The preacher was an angel. The message of his sermon? "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you." That is a heavy word: Savior. It says as much about us as it does about this child. If the angel had said "a teacher has been born" or "a mentor has been born," it would mean that within us exists the potential to fix all that is wrong with the world. It would mean we just need a bit of help: a coach, a mentor, a source of inspiration. But the angel said, "A Savior has been born." If one needs saving, it means he is totally helpless—completely lost—doomed, without outside intervention. That is how God the Father viewed us: helpless, lost, doomed. So, he sent more than a coach. He sent his only Son to be our Savior. After December 25 the secular world is done with Christmas. But for the Church, the season of Christmas has just begun. For twelve glorious days—The Twelve Days of Christmas—we will ponder the nativity of the Son of God. We will celebrate what that nativity means. A Savior is born!

THEME OF THE DAY: A SAVIOR IS BORN TO CHANGE THE WORLD

Families cherish their Christmas traditions. Year after year, they decorate the tree with the same ornaments, play the same music, bake the same Christmas cookies. Without asking, family members know when they will open presents. If you try to change your family's Christmas traditions, you just might pick a fight! When it comes to family Christmases, people generally don't like things to change. Because our celebration of Christmas is so steeped in unchanging traditions, it might be easy for us to miss that the Nativity of the Son of God meant radical change for the world. The birth of the Christ child meant that nothing in the world would ever be the same. We even divide history into the events that occurred "Before Christ" (BC) and after "Anno Domini" (AD), Latin for "Year of our Lord." Christmas traditions are wonderful. But make no mistake about it. Christmas is all about change. The Lord God came to change the world by becoming part of the world. Because we are part of the world, that means Christmas changes us too. This Christmas Eve, we see how.

Worship Leader

Pastor Justin Wilkens

Organist/Pianist

Quinton Corwin

Pre-Service Violinist

Isaiah Richert

Acknowledgments

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Opening Hymn: 353 Joy to the World

- 1 Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
let ev'ry heart prepare him room
and heav'n and nature sing,
and heav'n and nature sing,
and heav'n, and heav'n and nature
sing.
- 2 Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ,
while fields and floods, rocks, hills,
and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.
- 3 No more let sins and sorrows grow
nor thorns infest the ground;
he comes to make his blessings flow
far as the curse is found,
far as the curse is found,
far as, far as the curse is found.
- 4 He rules the world with truth and
grace
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love.

Text: Isaac Watts, 1674-1748

Text: Public domain

Bidding Prayer

Dear people of God, in this Christmas season, it is our duty and delight to hear again the message of the angels and, in heart and mind, to go to Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us—the Christ Child lying in a manger.

Let us read and learn in Holy Scripture the story of the loving purposes of God from the first days after our fall into sin to the glorious redemption brought to us by this holy child.

But first, let us pray for people all over the world who would delight with us to know the good news of Jesus Christ and who would join with us in singing his praises. Let us pray for the people of this city and for all those in our own congregation.

And, because this would please our Lord, let us remember in his name the poor and helpless, the cold, the hungry and the oppressed, the sick and those who are sad, the lonely and the unloved, and the elderly and the little children. We especially remember all those who do not know the Lord Jesus, those who do not love him, and those who by sin have grieved his heart of love.

Finally, let us remember before God all those who rejoice with us in heaven, who live in greater light than we, that multitude which no one can number, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, who died in faith, and who live before the throne of God and praise him each day in his temple. We confess that we are united with them as we are united with one another.

We humbly offer up these prayers and praises in the words of Christ himself:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.**

SERVICE OF LESSONS AND CAROLS

First Lesson

Genesis 3:8–15

Humanity's separation from God dates to the beginning of time, to the fall into sin by the first humans, Adam and Eve. As tragic as this was, the account ends with God's promise of rescue— that the woman's offspring, Christ, would ultimately defeat Satan, and the rule of sin and death.

⁸ They heard the voice of the Lord God, who was walking around in the garden during the cooler part of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

⁹ The Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"

¹⁰ The man said, "I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself."

¹¹ God said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?"

¹² The man said, "The woman you gave to be with me—she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

¹³ The Lord God said to the woman, "What have you done?"
The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

¹⁴ The Lord God said to the serpent:
Because you have done this,
you are cursed more than all the livestock,
and more than every wild animal.
You shall crawl on your belly,
and you shall eat dust all the days of your life.

¹⁵ I will put hostility between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her seed.
He will crush your head,
and you will crush his heel.

The Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God.

Hymn: 304 What Hope! An Eden Prophesied

- 1 What hope! An Eden prophesied
where tame live with the wild,
the lamb and lion side by side,
led by a little child!
- 2 A shoot will sprout from Jesse's stem,
a branch from David's line,
a Prince of Peace in Bethlehem:
the fruit of God's design.
- 3 As banner of God's love unfurled,
Christ came to suffer loss,
that by his death a dying world
would rally to the cross.
- 4 Come, Jesus, come, Messiah Lord,
lost Paradise restore;
lead past the angel's flaming sword—
come, open heaven's door.

Text: Stephen P. Starke, b. 1955

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Second Lesson

Genesis 22:15–18

God promises to faithful Abraham that in his seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

¹⁵ The Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶ and said, "I have sworn by myself, declares the Lord, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will bless you greatly, and I will multiply your descendants greatly, like the stars of the sky and like the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the city gates of their enemies. ¹⁸ In your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

Hymn: 315 Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord

sts. 1–4

- 1 Let the earth now praise the Lord,
who has truly kept his word
and at last to us did send
Christ, the sinner's help and friend.
- 2 What the fathers most desired,
what the prophets' heart inspired,
what they longed for many' a year
stands fulfilled in glory here.
- 3 Abram's promised great reward,
Zion's helper, Jacob's Lord—
him of twofold race behold—
truly came, as long foretold.
- 4 Savior, hear my welcome cry—
loud hosannas lifted high!
King of glory, enter in;
cleanse my soul of ev'ry sin.

Text: Heinrich Held, 1620–1659, abr.; (sts. 1–3): tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1827–1878, alt.; (st. 4): tr. Christian Worship, 2021

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Third Lesson

Isaiah 9:2, 6, 7

In love God promised a rescue to Adam and Eve already. Through the prophets he repeated that promise many times over centuries before the birth of Jesus.

²The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.
For those living in the land of the shadow of death, the light has dawned.

⁶For to us a child is born.

To us a son is given.

The authority to rule will rest on his shoulders.

He will be named:

Wonderful Counselor,

Mighty God,

Everlasting Father,

Prince of Peace.

⁷There will be no limit to his authority
and no end to the peace he brings.

He will rule on David's throne and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
from now on, into eternity.

The zeal of the Lord of Armies will accomplish this.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

Hymn: 381 The People Who in Darkness Walked

1 The people who in darkness walked
have seen a glorious light;
the heav'nly dawn broke forth on those
who dwelt in death and night,
who dwelt in death and night.

2 To us a child of hope is born,
to us a son is giv'n,
and on his shoulders ever rests
all pow'r in earth and heav'n,
all pow'r in earth and heav'n.

3 His name shall be the Prince of Peace,
the Everlasting Lord,

the Wonderful, the Counselor,
the God by all adored,
the God by all adored.

4 His righteous government and pow'r
shall over all extend;
on judgment and on justice based,
his reign shall have no end,
his reign shall have no end.

5 Lord Jesus, reign in us, we pray,
and make us yours alone,
for you are with the Father and
the Spirit ever one,
the Spirit ever one.

Text: John Morison, 1749–1798, abr., alt.
Text: Public domain

Fourth Lesson

Isaiah 11:1–9

A Branch from the stump of Jesse will bear fruit.

The Branch From Jesse

¹ A shoot will spring up from the stump of Jesse,
and a Branch from his roots will bear fruit.

² The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him:
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

³ He will be delighted with the fear of the Lord.
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
nor will he render decisions based on what he hears with his ears,
⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the poor,
and he will render fair decisions in favor of the oppressed on the earth.

He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath from his lips he will put the wicked to death.

⁵ Righteousness will be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his hips.

⁶ The wolf will dwell with the lamb,

and the leopard will lie down with the young goat,
the calf, the young lion, and the fattened calf together,
and a little child will lead them.

⁷The cow and the bear will graze together,
and their young ones will lie down together.
The lion will eat straw like the cattle.

⁸The nursing child will play near a cobra's hole,
and the weaned child will put his hand into a viper's den.

⁹They will not hurt or destroy anywhere on my holy mountain,
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord,
as the waters cover the sea.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

Hymn: 360 Behold, a Branch Is Growing

- 1 Behold, a branch is growing
of loveliest form and grace!
As prophets sang, foreknowing,
it springs from Jesse's race
and now begins to flow'r
in midst of coldest winter,
at deepest midnight hour.
- 2 Isaiah had foretold it
in words of promise sure,
and Mary's arms enfold it,
a virgin meek and pure.
Through God's eternal will
this child to her is given
at midnight calm and still.
- 3 This flow'r, whose fragrance tender
with sweetness fills the air,
dispels with glorious splendor
the darkness ev'rywhere.
True man, and yet true God,
from sin and death he saves us
and lightens ev'ry load.

4 O Savior, child of Mary,
 who felt our human woes,
O Savior, King of glory,
 who conquered all our foes,
bring us at last, we pray,
 to the bright courts of heaven
and to the endless day.

Text: German, 16th cent.; (sts. 1–3): tr. Harriet R. K. Spaeth, 1845–1925; (st. 4): John C. Mattes, 1876–1948, alt.
Text: Public domain

Fifth Lesson

Luke 1:26–35, 38

God could have initiated the climax of his plan in some stunning manner. But he chooses a humble virgin. Along with Mary we might say, "Why?" And along with Mary we humbly accept God's plan and marvel at it.

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

²⁶ In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged in marriage to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women."

²⁹ But she was greatly troubled by the statement and was wondering what kind of greeting this could be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, because you have found favor with God. ³¹ Listen, you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end."

³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁸ Then Mary said, "See, I am the Lord's servant. May it happen to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

Hymn: 328 The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came

- 1 The angel Gabriel from heaven came,
his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame:
"All hail," said he to meek and lowly Mary,
"most highly favored maiden." Gloria!
- 2 "I come from heav'n to tell the Lord's decree:
a blessèd virgin mother you shall be.
Your son shall be Immanuel, by seers foretold,
most highly favored maiden." Gloria!
- 3 Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head;
"To me be as it pleases God," she said.
"My soul shall praise and magnify his holy name."
Most highly favored maiden, Gloria!
- 4 Of her Immanuel, the Christ, was born
in Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,
and Christian folk throughout the world will ever say,
"Most highly favored maiden." Gloria!

Text: para. Sabine Baring-Gould, 1834–1924, alt.; Basque, c. 18th cent.
Text: Public domain

Sixth Lesson

Luke 2:1–20

St. Luke tells of the birth of Jesus.

The Birth of Jesus

¹ In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³ And everyone went to register, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the town of Nazareth, into Judea, to the town of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was from the house and family line of David. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, his wife, who was pledged to him in marriage and was expecting a child.

⁶ And so it was that while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

⁸ There were in the same country shepherds staying out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around

them, and they were terrified! ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. For behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all people: ¹¹ Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude from the heavenly army, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind."

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Now let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they told others the message they had been told about this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it were amazed by what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Meditation: Luke 2:1-20

Hymn: 340 Away in a Manger

- 1 Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,
the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.
- 2 The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.
I love you, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky,
and stay by my side until morning is nigh
- 3 Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay
close by me forever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in your tender care,
and take us to heaven to live with you there.

Seventh Lesson

Titus 2:11–14

The grace God showed us in sending his Son not only changes our lives now but also changes our eternal destiny.

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. ¹² It trains us to reject ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope, that is, the glorious appearance of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ He gave himself for us, to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people who are his own chosen people, eager to do good works.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

Offering Hymn: 350 Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

1 Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King;
peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations rise,
join the triumph of the skies;
with th'angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!" (Refrain)

Ref Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"

2 Christ, by highest heav'n adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come,
offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
hail th'incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with man to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel! (Refrain)

3 Hail, the heav'nly Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,

ris'n with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that man no more may die,
born to raise the sons of earth,
born to give them second birth. (Refrain)

Text: Charles Wesley, 1707–1788, alt.
Text: Public domain

CANDLE LIGHTING

During the singing of "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" acolytes/ushers will light their candles from the Christ Candle. They will proceed down the center aisle so that you may light your candles from theirs. Please keep lit candles upright, tipping only unlit candles to receive the flame from the lit ones.

CLOSING PRAYER

O God, who makes us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of your only Son, Jesus Christ; grant that, as we joyfully receive him as our Redeemer, so may we also behold him with sure confidence when he shall come to be our judge; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

BLESSING

May he who by his incarnation gathered things earthly and heavenly into one, fill you with such joy that comes from the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the + Son and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you always.

Amen.

Closing Hymn: 337 Silent Night, Holy Night

- 1 Silent night, holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace,
sleep in heavenly peace.

- 2 Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight.
Glories stream from heaven afar,
heav'nly hosts sing, Alleluia!
Christ, the Savior, is born!
Christ, the Savior, is born!

- 3 Silent night, holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
radiant beams from thy holy face
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

Text: tr. John F. Young, 1820–1885; Franz Joseph Mohr, 1792–1848
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