

THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

December 25, 2005

St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

WHO IS THIS CHILD? Matthew 1:18-25

Over two thousand years ago a carpenter in his 20's living in the town of Nazareth was facing a difficult situation in his young life. He had become engaged to a young woman. They had made their promises to each other but according to the customs of their day they had not yet moved in and begun to live together. This young man found that his wife was expecting a child and he knew that he was not the father. This could only mean that his wife had been unfaithful and had an affair with someone else. Think how devastated and betrayed Joseph must have felt. Here they had promised themselves to each other and now she is expecting someone else's child. What is he going to do? He could have gotten revenge and had her publicly stoned to death for adultery. That is what the Law of Moses commanded for those who were caught committing adultery, public execution by stoning. In the book of Leviticus we read, "If a man commits adultery with another man's wife – with the wife of his neighbor – both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death." (Leviticus 20:10) But Matthew tells us that Joseph was a righteous man. He did not want to expose Mary to public shame, humiliation, disgrace and possible death. He could have proceeded with the marriage and taken Mary as his wife and had people assume that they had relations before they came together. Or he could have divorced her secretly and have her leave town so that she would not be disgraced.

Joseph made the decision to divorce her secretly and then go on with his life. After he had made that decision an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said to him, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (Vv. 20-21) Now what is he going to do? This heavenly messenger in his dream says, "don't do what you have decided to do, but rather go ahead with the marriage and take Mary home to live with you." What would you do? Would you take this woman who you believe to have been unfaithful home as your wife? Would you believe the words of this angel that appeared to you in a dream and do what the angel said?

The miracle is that Joseph believed the angel. We are told that he took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus. (Vv. 24-25) The virgin birth is a miracle. But the fact that these two young people also believed what the angel had told them is a miracle. The fact that you I believe this is also a miracle. For we confess in the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary." This is something that had never happened in the history of the world and it has never happened since that time over 2,000 years ago.

Who exactly is this child that Joseph was to call Jesus which means Savior or God saves? Well Matthew in his letter that he is writing to Jews to tell them that this Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah of Israel makes this comment and quotes from the prophet Isaiah who wrote almost 700 years before this event. Matthew writes, "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." (Vv. 22-23) This child whose birthday we are celebrating today is no ordinary child. This is the almighty God. As Isaiah had foretold, his name is Immanuel. He is God with us.

Isn't this comforting to know that the God that you and I worship, trust and follow has become one of us? He came to this earth to be with us. He understands what you and I are experiencing because he experienced it too. You know when you are grieving over the death of a loved one; you have people who mean well say, "I know how you feel." And you may think, "How do you know how I am feeling. You're not me." But Jesus who is God with us can say that and he does. He's experienced the same things. Remember how he stood at the grave of his dear friend Lazarus and the Bible tells us, "Jesus wept." (John 11:35) When we feel that no one

understands us; no one realizes what we are going through; Jesus does. As the Bible says, “We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are – yet was without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15) Jesus God with us is still with you and me to this day. When Jesus ascended into heaven on the 40th day after his resurrection he promised us, “Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20b)

So who is this child? This is the Son of God and the Son of Mary. He is both God and Man in one person. This is no ordinary child whose birthday we are celebrating today. This is the God-Man, Jesus Christ, and Immanuel whose birthday we Christians celebrate every December 25th.

Amen.

WHAT IS THIS CHILD TO DO? Matthew 1:18-25

Whenever a child is born, parents have dreams of what their child might become and what he might accomplish with his life. You often hear people say to parents, “Is your son going to follow in his father’s footsteps?” If the father was a businessman, people often assume that the son will take over the business when his father retires or dies. In days gone by sons often did follow in their father’s footsteps and learned a certain trade or profession from their father. In the past sons of farmers often became farmers. Sons of pastors and teachers often became pastors and teachers and sons of factory workers often worked in factories as did their fathers. Today that is often not the case.

This child born to the Virgin Mary, what would he become? Would he become a carpenter like his step-father Joseph? The angel told Joseph what this child would do. In fact, the name given to the child clearly states his mission in life. The angel said, “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” (v. 21) The name Jesus is the same as the Hebrew name Joshua. They both mean God saves.

The mission that Jesus Christ had when he came to this earth was to save the people of this earth from their sins. Why do we need to be saved from our sins? Sin which is imperfection, disobedience and rebellion has separated us from our Creator. Sin is what makes life so miserable. Sin is why each of us is dying and if Jesus doesn’t return first we will all experience the ripping of our souls from our physical bodies. Another result of sin is being eternally separated from all of God’s blessings in hell. If someone hadn’t done something to rescue us, we would all eventually be eternally separated from God in hell. We would suffer forever and never have any hope of relief or escape. We would go through this life burdened with guilt and fear. We would know that one day we would have to answer for all of our imperfections and disobedience. Death would be terrifying for us.

The good news is that Jesus came to save us from our sins. How did he do that? In order to save us from our sins, he had to live a holy and perfect life. Since Jesus’ father was God he had no original sin. He was conceived and born perfect. He was only the third person in the history of this world to be perfect. The first two were Adam and Eve and they lost their perfection when they trusted the devil rather than believing the word of God. Now as the perfect God-Man Jesus experienced the temptations of the devil, the scorn and ridicule of the unbelieving world and he overcame all temptations. He lived a holy life for us. He did what God demands of every one of us. For God says, “You shall be holy, for I the Lord, your God am holy.” (Leviticus 19:2) Jesus, the God-Man, was holy for each and every one of us. He kept all the laws of God perfectly for the entire human race. But God also said that “the wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23a) and “the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished.” (Nahum 1:3b) That’s rather frightening. We are all guilty. God reveals that to us also. He says, “There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.” (Ecclesiastes 7:20) And then the Apostle Paul says to us, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) So what does Jesus, our Savior, do? He is punished for us. That was his mission after living a holy life for us to be punished in our place and endure the torments and hell that we should receive. He did that on the cross on

Good Friday. When he shouted, "It is finished." (John 19:30b) His mission was accomplished. He had successfully saved the human race. He had done what the angel told Joseph he would do.

What relief for you and me. We are forgiven. God's justice and anger have been satisfied. We don't have to live in fear. We don't have to be afraid that God is going to punish us eternally for our sins. Jesus received that punishment. We don't have to be afraid to die. Our physical death now means the entrance of our souls into the joys and peace of heaven. And our physical death is temporary. On the last day our souls and bodies are going to be reunited and we will be holy and perfect just as Jesus is.

This is why Christmas is such a wonderful time for Christians. We are celebrating the time when God became one with us. He came to be with us to save us and he accomplished his job and received an A+ for his work. Thank God that Jesus did what he was supposed to do. This and only this gives each of us forgiveness, peace and hope everyday of our life on this earth.

Amen.