

The Wednesday of Ember Week in Advent
St. Luke 1:26-38
December 20th, 2023
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

In the Sixth Month

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sermon Text:

“Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.”

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

My dear friends, this is the time of the year when we hear often about the “true meaning of Christmas.” Often people get it wrong. They will say Christmas is about togetherness, or family, or doing “Christmas activities.” Or, they will say that Christmas is about the food and goodies that people spend countless hours preparing and baking and cooking. While there is nothing inherently evil in these things, they have nothing to do with Christmas, let alone the “true meaning of Christmas.” Sometimes people will get close. They will say Christmas is about love, or hope, or peace, or forgiveness. These, again, are all good things, but they still miss the mark when it comes to the true meaning of Christmas.

We will also see signs declaring “Jesus is the reason for the season.” This statement is not a wrong statement, but it is an incomplete statement. This is the problem with bumper sticker theology; with catchphrase theology, it just does not say enough. For a statement like “Jesus is the reason for the season” does not tell us anything about Who + Jesus is. Is + Jesus some Hispanic person? Who is this + “Jesus?” Many people believe + Jesus is some teacher, or philosopher, Who lived in the beginning of the first century. He said a lot of good things that a person may or may not believe or follow. And this is if the person actually believes that + Jesus was a real person, and not some mythical character that Christians made up.

No, my dear friends, the saying “Jesus is the reason for the season” is just not a complete statement, for it tells us nothing of Who our Lord + Jesus actually is. Therefore, we cannot learn anything about the true meaning of Christmas from the slogan theologian. The Evangelist St. Luke in the Gospel reading for today does, however. For he records the words of the Angel Gabriel who was sent to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house and lineage of King David, whose name was Mary. He came to the Blessed Virgin Mary of Nazareth in the sixth month after St. John the Baptist’s was conceived in the womb of her kinswoman, Elizabeth. The Angel Gabriel tells the Blessed Virgin Mary Who she would bear in her womb. The Angel Gabriel tells us exactly Who our Lord + Jesus is, and what is the true meaning of Christmas.

For the true meaning of Christmas is all about the incarnation of the Lord God in our flesh. There is no other reason to celebrate Christmas if one is not celebrating the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us. There is no reason to celebrate Christmas if we are not rejoicing that God has become man. There are many churches that seem afraid to say this. They will say “the Savior is born”, or + “Jesus is born”, or “the Redeemer is born” always just skirting the truth of Christmas that the *Lord God* is born. I suspect this has a lot to do with their theology, for if they deny that the Lord + Jesus can be bodily present in bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper, they cannot bring themselves to say that God dwells in our flesh, for they believe the infinite cannot dwell in the finite.

This is a denial of a pretty basic Scriptural truth for the Angel Gabriel tells us exactly Who the Blessed Virgin Mary will conceive in her womb by the overshadowing of the power of the Most High at the coming upon her of the Holy Ghost. What does the Angel Gabriel tell us about the birth of our Lord + Jesus in the sixth month after St. John the Baptist’s conception? St. Mary, the Theotokos, the God-bearer, will give birth to a Son. She will call His Name + JESUS, which means “Savior.” He shall be great. He shall be called the Son of the Most High, that is, He will be the Son of God. And because He is the Son of God, the Lord God shall give to Him the throne of His father David. He is the One Who will fulfill the promise made to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He is the One Who fulfills the promise made to the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the One Who fulfills the promise made to King David, that he would never lack a man to sit on his throne; that his kingdom would be an everlasting kingdom. He will rule over Israel, and of His Kingdom there will be no end.

This is Who our Lord + Jesus is. This is Who we celebrate at Christmas. This is why we have a cause and reason to celebrate. For we are the spiritual Israel. We are the Church. We have been adopted as sons into this glorious Kingdom. We have been promised eternal life, an eternal Kingdom in Heaven. And our Lord + Jesus, Who is the Lord God in our flesh, will reign over us forever and ever. For He has humbled Himself to be born of a Virgin. He has humbled Himself by coming down from His heavenly throne, to set aside His divinity and dwell with us in our humanity. He has taken upon Himself our flesh, so that He might purify it through His perfect obedience to the will of His heavenly Father, and through His innocent suffering and death.

Without this Incarnation of our Lord and Savior + Jesus, the Christ, there is really no cause to celebrate. Getting together with friends and family, eating good and delicious foods, being kind to one another, and the like, are all nice things. But these things all pass away quickly as soon as the season has passed, because we, and the whole world, are filled with sin. One minute we are jolly and enjoying the season, and the next minute we are yelling at our kids or family members, or even complete strangers, because of some perceived attack against us. This is why there are people in our society who want to do away with Christmas all together, because all they see is the failed family gatherings that degenerated into another argument and strife. They fail to see that they are filled with sin, and they can do nothing to get rid of sin in themselves. Therefore, their family gatherings will always end this way because they have no Savior, no cause for repentance and asking for and giving of forgiveness.

We who are well aware of how much of a poor, miserable sinner we are rejoice in this season of Christmas for a different reason. When we look at the manger in which our Lord + Jesus is laid we do not just see another Jewish Baby Boy. We do not celebrate in this season of Christmas that Jewish Baby Boy getting another year older. We poor sinners celebrate that the Lord God has become man and dwelt among us. We celebrate that we who could not, and cannot, save ourselves by our own works and behavior, have a Lord God Who comes to us in order to save us. For, as the Angel Gabriel says to the Blessed Virgin Mary, “For no word from God shall be void of power.” What He promised long ago when our first parents sinned in the Garden of Eden, He has fulfilled through His Incarnation. He has promised through His Angel Gabriel that the Blessed Virgin Mary will conceive and bear a Son Named + JESUS. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.

This, my dear friends, is why we celebrate Christmas. It is why we celebrate Christmas not just by family gatherings and eating good food, but by coming to this holy house to hear God's Word—His promises of salvation—and receive His gifts. For His gifts are forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. His gift to us is Himself. He gifts Himself to us by taking upon Himself our flesh and dwelling among us. He now dwells among us in His Word and Sacraments. This is why we are gathered here today, to receive Him as He comes to us. For we who remain steadfast in faith towards Him will be granted an eternal life in Heaven, when He comes again on the Last Day to take us from this vale of tears to our eternal home.

Therefore, my dear friends, let us rejoice this day that the Lord + Jesus is indeed the reason for the season, but not the generic good-guy philosopher + Jesus Who is everybody's pal, Who is just another person Who lived a long time ago. No, my dear friends, let us rejoice that the true meaning of Christmas is about our Lord God taking upon Himself our flesh. It is about our Lord God humbling Himself to be born of a virgin, in order that He might fulfill the Law which we break daily and often, and Who pays the penalty of our sins by offering up His life as a ransom for ours on the tree of the holy cross. Let us celebrate this Lord + Jesus. Let us celebrate the Incarnation of the Lord God in our flesh, for by His work we have forgiveness from our sins. Thanks be to the Lord God Almighty for His precious gift of His dear Son to us. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!