

## Sermon followed by Service

Christmas Day 2023

Hebrews 1:1-9

What size do you like your Jesus? Small-sized? Life-sized? Super-sized? Super-sized to rule your world ... super-sized to pick you up when you need picking up? Or life-sized so you can have a heart-to-heart talk with him ... life-sized so you know he understands where you're coming from? Or do you like your Jesus small-sized, baby-sized? Cute, adorable. What size do you like your Jesus?

Today we marvel at how God made Jesus small-sized, baby-sized. The miracle of babies is amazing, but the miracle of the baby Jesus is amazing to a whole new level. Like Mary on Christmas Day, we wonder and we wow at what God gives us in Jesus - God in a baby. We think about it; we sing about it; we decorate our world with the image of it - God wrapped up in a baby. It is so amazing to think about ... how God made his Son - his all-powerful, all-creating Son; his eternal, here before the world was here Son; his everywhere, you can't go anywhere to get away from him Son; God made that all-glorious Son of God, to be baby-sized. The more I think about it, the more amazed I get.

What we probably don't think about so much is how we make Jesus small. The way we make Jesus small by not making time for him. The way we make Jesus small by blowing off his Word when we don't like what he says. The way we make Jesus small by thinking we know better than him. Sometimes it seems we like a small-sized Jesus best, not because we love to worship and marvel at the baby Jesus, but because we like to push Jesus and squeeze Jesus and keep him off to the side.

But is Jesus really that small that we can push him to the side, then fit him in when and where we want? Is Jesus really so small that we can get by without him ... or so small that he can't do what we need him to do? Our words might say: "no, no, no." But what do our schedules, our checkbooks, our priorities say? That we have a super-sized Jesus who comes first, or that we have a small-sized Jesus we fit in when and where we want? What do our worries say? That we have a super-sized Jesus who rules the world for us or that we have a small-sized Jesus who can't? Our lesson today is for people who are tempted to see Jesus too small. And depending on the day, that includes all of us.

So what size do we get to see Jesus? Not just baby-sized ... not just life-sized ... but God-sized. In that little baby was born the Son of God through whom all the universe was made. In that little baby was born the Son of God who is heir and owner of all things. In that little baby is the exact representation of God's being. In that little baby Jesus is God himself, the God who sustains all things, the God who holds all things together. In that little baby was born the radiance of God's glory, that is, in that little baby, in the 12-year-old boy at the temple, in the teen and twenty-something carpenter, in the thirty-something preacher, teacher, and miracle-worker, in the Lamb of God on the cross, and in the Easter Lord of life promising "Peace" ... God showed in Jesus what he considers his greatest glory - not his amazing power, but his amazing grace - his love for you and for me and for all people.

What does that mean for us? If you want to know what God is about, the answer isn't to get all spiritual, the answer is Jesus. He gives us the Word of God; he shows us the glory of God. If you want to know what is holding this world together, what is keeping this world from tearing itself apart ... the answer isn't physics or the power of human goodness, the answer is Jesus. If you want to know God's way to save the world, the answer isn't in some supernatural feeling, but the answer is the Word of Christ, the cross of Christ, and the judgment of the living, bodied, flesh and blood Christ.

So what size do we get to see Jesus? Not just baby-sized ... not just life-sized ... but God-sized. God-sized in a way that we don't get to shrink to fit our style. God-sized in a way that we don't get to push off to the side. God-sized in a way that he could take that thumb he stuck in his mouth, and squash us. He could take his little baby pinky, and fling us off into outer space. Yes, he could see us and treat us as small as we have seen him and treated him. But that's not what he did or what he does. Instead, Jesus let himself be seen as small and treated as small. Then, instead of giving us what we had given him, that little baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger - he grew to stretch himself out on the cross to face the evil of this world and the judgment of the heavens. Instead of ridding himself of us, he rid us of our sin. Instead of washing us away; he washed our guilt away. And today, that Jesus who was born in Bethlehem is the Son of God seated at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. The baby born in small-town Bethlehem is Ruler and Judge of the world.

So what size do we get to see Jesus? Not just baby-sized, not just life-sized ... not even angel-sized .... The angels who sang in the sky on Christmas Eve now worship Jesus in heaven. The angels who tended to his weakness on earth, now serve his strength in heaven. Yes, with the angels we get to see Jesus - God-sized!

What does all that mean for us? Paul put it this way: **“You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich.”** Today, with the baby Jesus on our minds, we could put it this way: “Jesus lived small, so we can live large.” In Jesus, God himself speaks to us! In Jesus, we have the creator, the heir, the holder of all things; yes, we have the one who holds together all the universe, as our brother! In Jesus, we have the King of kings and Lord of lords setting up his kingdom for us, a kingdom where we get to live large, right with God ... a kingdom where we get to live large with the peace and riches of heaven all around us, a kingdom where we get to live large as the children of God himself. Why? Because the Son of God made himself small, baby-Jesus-small, for you. Amen.



**St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church**  
*A Family Connecting in Christ*

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Christmas Day

December 25, 2023

## MERRY CHRISTMAS

WELCOME VISITORS!

We hope you feel at home with us.

We hope you enjoy worshiping with us today. But more importantly, we pray that you hear the wonderful Gospel message that Jesus came down to Earth to live and die for our sins, and rose again from the dead so that each of us may go to Heaven when we die.

**We are a Bible-teaching church.** We aren't here to tell you what people think. We are here to tell you what God says in the Bible. We believe and teach that every word of the Bible is God's Word. For more than 30 years, **St John Christian Day School** has taught children from Preschool (age 3) through 8th Grade. Let your children get a great education in a safe and caring environment where Christian principles are supported. Call 847-362-4424 for more information. Our members also support and attend **Shoreland Lutheran High School** in Somers, WI, 262-859-2595. St. John is a member of WELS, the **Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod** ([www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net)).

**We are a church with children.** We love to have children with us for worship. Children's worship bulletins and "church bags" (with paper, colors, Bible story books) are available from an usher. Baby noises can be beautiful to our Savior who said, "Let the little children come to me." If children are crying loudly, our nursery and Gathering Area (back of the church) are audio-equipped and available for you and your young children. After the children regain their composure, come back so we can all worship together.

# The Festival of the Nativity

## PRELUDE

**Piano:** *Christmas Hymn Medley - arranged by Valerie A. Floeter*

**Organ:** *To Shepherds as They Watched by Night - Paul Manz*

*What Child Is This – setting by Edwin T. Childs*

*Of the Father's Love Begotten - James Southbridge*

*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing - setting by Edwin T. Childs*

## OPENING HYMN

*“Come, All Ye Faithful”*

**Hymn 354 (v. 1, 2, 4)**

**(Stand for v. 4)**

## INVOCATION

**M:** The grace of our Lord † Jesus Christ, and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**C:** **And also with you.**

## CHRISTMAS LITANY

**M:** Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;

Let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

*Psalm 95:1*

**C:** **O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!**

**You have set your glory above the heavens.**

*Psalm 8:1*

**M:** Give thanks to the Lord of lords,

to him who alone does great wonders,

who by his understanding made the heavens,

who spread out the earth upon the waters,

who made the great lights –

the sun to govern the day, the moon and stars to govern the night.

*Psalm 136*

**C:** **Great is our Lord and mighty in power;**

**his understanding has no limit.**

*Psalm 147:5*

- M: But our iniquities have separated us from our God;  
 our sins have hidden his face from us, so that he will not hear.  
 We look for light, but all is darkness;  
 for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows.  
 We look for deliverance, but it is far away. *Isaiah 59:2, 9*
- C: For our offenses are many in his sight, and our sins testify against us.  
 Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities.** *Isaiah 59:12*
- M: The Lord is compassionate and gracious,  
 slow to anger, abounding in love.  
 He will not always accuse,  
 nor will he harbor his anger forever;  
 he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
 or repay us according to our iniquities. *Psalms 103:8-10*
- C: From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets,  
 the name of the Lord is to be praised.** *Psalms 113:3*
- M: "The days are coming," declares the Lord,  
 "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch,  
 a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.  
 In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety.  
 This is the name by which he will be called:  
 The Lord our Righteousness." *Jeremiah 23:5, 6*
- C: Prepare the way for the Lord,  
 make straight paths for him.** *Matthew 3:3*
- M: Do not be afraid.  
 I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.  
 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you;  
 he is Christ the Lord. *Luke 2:10,11*
- C: Let the name of the Lord be praised,  
 both now and forevermore. Alleluia!** *Psalms 113:2*

HYMN

*"To Shepherds as They Watched by Night"*  
 Hymn 335 (v. 2-6)

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

M: Almighty God,  
grant that the birth of your only Son in the flesh  
may set us free from our old bondage under the yoke of sin.  
Pour out your Holy Spirit into the world,  
so that the message of the babe born in Bethlehem  
might change the lives and destinies of many more people;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever.

C: **Amen.**

## FIRST LESSON

Luke 2:1-14

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest,  
And on earth peace to men on  
Whom his favor rests."



HYMN

*"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"*

Hymn 350

SECOND LESSON

Hebrews 1:1-9

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

For to which of the angels did God ever say,

"You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father"?

*Psalm 2:7*

Or again,

"I will be his Father,  
and he will be my Son"?

*2 Samuel 7:14*

And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says,

"Let all God's angels worship him."

*Deuteronomy 32:43*

In speaking of the angels he says,

"He makes his angels winds,  
his servants flames of fire."

*Psalm 104:4*

But about the Son he says,

"Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever,  
and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom.  
You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;  
therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions  
by anointing you with the oil of joy."

*Psalm 45:6-7*

HYMN

*"Of the Father's Love Begotten"*

Hymn 358

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

#### CONFESSION OF FAITH

Excerpts from the Athanasian Creed

See *Christian Worship*, pp. 284-285, for the complete Athanasian Creed.

P: It is necessary for eternal salvation truly to believe that our Lord Jesus Christ also took on human flesh.

C: **Now this is the true Christian faith.**

**We believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, is both God and man.**

P: He is God, eternally begotten from the nature of the Father, and he is man, born in time from the nature of his mother,

C: **fully God, fully man, with rational soul and human flesh,**

- P: equal to the Father as to his deity, less than the Father as to his humanity;  
and though he is both God and man,
- C: **Christ is not two persons, but one,**
- P: one, not by changing the deity into flesh, but by taking the humanity into God;  
one, indeed, not by mixture of the natures, but by unity in one person;  
for just as the rational soul and flesh are one human being,
- C: **so God and man are one Christ.**
- C: **He suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty, and from there will come to judge the living and the dead.**
- This is the true Christian faith.**

*The Athanasian Creed*

*Next to the mystery of the holy Trinity, the greatest mystery in heaven and on earth is the personal union, that God and man are a single person in our Lord Jesus Christ. Throughout the history of the New Testament church, reason, logic, and paganism have fought to cloud the identity of God as Triune and Jesus Christ as both true God and true man. To clear the confusion and safeguard the Truth, the Athanasian Creed was written as the Church's confession of the identity of our God and Savior. In seeking to clear confusion and safeguard Truth, some might say, the Athanasian Creed brings its own confusion - is it necessary for salvation to know the Athanasian Creed and to understand all it declares? We rest on the promise of Jesus: "God so loved the world that he gave his One and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." At the same time, we sound the warning of the Creed - those who reject what this creed teaches are rejecting the true identity of their God and Savior. Thank you, Lord, for teaching us who you are!*

HYMN

*"What Child is This"*  
Hymn 344

SERMON

Hebrew 1:1-9

HYMN

*"O Rejoice, All Christians, Loudly"*  
Hymn 366

## OFFERING – A Gift for Our Savior

An offering plate is in the front of the church, and an old wooden church in the Narthex Gathering Area for your offerings to our Savior.

*If you prefer online giving, you may scan this code with your mobile device.*



## PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

M: On this holy day, dear Father, we rejoice to hear the good news of great joy that a Savior has been born for us. For fulfilling your prophecies and in the fullness of time sending your Son to be our Savior, we give you our heartfelt thanks and praise.

C: **Unto us a child is born! Unto us a Son is given!**

M: What a great mystery of our faith this is: that God has become fully human for our salvation! Even though he is the all-powerful Lord of all, he is wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.

C: **Help us always believe that this precious child was born as our substitute to take our place in life and in death and so to be our Savior.**

M: In the midst of our joy, we grieve for the many people in our world who do not know that Jesus has come to bring them forgiveness and healing. As the shepherds spread abroad the good news of the birth of the Savior born for all the world, may we also make use of the unique opportunities this holiday presents to tell others of what we have seen and heard concerning the child.

C: **Grant that the true peace between God and fallen mankind may comfort all people.**

*Special prayers and intercessions may follow*

M: As the angels sang out their praise, move us also to sing out our praise to you, today and every day, as the joy of Christmas remains in our hearts.

C: **Glory to God in the highest! Amen.**

M: Father, we bring these prayers before you this Christmas and always, confident that you will hear and answer them. For it was your only Son who taught us to pray:

## LORD'S PRAYER

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.

## BLESSING

M: Brothers and sisters, go in peace. Live in harmony with one another.  
Serve the Lord with gladness.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace.

C: Amen!

## HYMN

*"Joy to the World"*  
Hymn 353

## POSTLUDE

*Joy to the World* - Michael Burkhardt  
*Oh, Come All Ye Faithful* - Hilton Kean Jones

*In the Peace and Joy of the Christ-child,  
Have a Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year*

## Acknowledgments

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# Join Us In Worship This Christmas Season!

New Year's Eve Service – 5 p.m.  
Followed by Game Night!

*Be part of our annual New Year's Eve tradition!  
Bring along a favorite game and  
a snack to share and  
we will have a great time together!*

## WORSHIP NOTES

### THE SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

You are probably familiar with the carol *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. While that carol isn't religious, its title does capture the fact that on Christmas Day the Christian Church begins a twelve day celebration.

Historically, the celebration of Christmas didn't begin until Christmas Eve. That was the night homes were decorated with trees and tinsel. (It is the secularization of Christmas and the desire to have a longer shopping season that has pushed the "beginning" of Christmas back into October.) Christmas Eve often consisted of a vigil, either at church or in the home, that was quiet and muted. Then, come Christmas Day, all Christians would gather in church as a joyous celebration began. Families would continue to worship (and, yes, give gifts) for twelve straight days. The celebration of Christmas would end with the Festival of the Epiphany, marking the appearance of the Wise Men celebrating that Christ is King for all peoples.

### THE FESTIVAL OF THE NATIVITY

*Nativus* is Latin for "birth." By the fourth century, the early Christian Church had set December 25 as the day to celebrate the birth of Christ. Along with Easter, it quickly became one of the major celebrations in the Church Year. It always included celebration of the Lord's Supper. This is seen in the word *Christmas*, which is simply short for "Christ's Mass."