

Sermon followed by Service

Christmas Day 2024 - Exodus 33:20

Were you thinking what I thought? “What? Why?” With our Old Testament lesson - “No one can see God and live” - why that lesson on Christmas Day? If we need an Old Testament lesson, why not Isaiah: “**For to us a child is born, to us a son is given**”? Why not Micah: “But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, out of you will come to be one who will be Ruler in Israel.” Why not something with the spirit and the joy of Christmas? Why “no one can see God and live”?

Why? It’s hard to appreciate Christmas without knowing the alternative. Let me say that again: It’s hard to truly appreciate what Christmas is really about without knowing the alternative.

The alternative to Christmas with Christ is not a “Happy Holiday,” a Christless Winterfest with lights and snowmen and stuff. The alternative to Christmas with Christ is not a Festivus with the airing of grievances, or a dark season of Grinchyness or Scroogyness. No, the alternative to Christmas with Christ is your worst day ever with an unapproachable God - your worst day ever and your only hope for help is unapproachable, your worst day ever and the one you have to answer to is unapproachable, your worst day ever and your judge, from whom you need mercy and hope, is unapproachable.

It’s your worst day ever and your god is unapproachable. What do you do? Or, it’s not your worst day ever, but you don’t want a worst day ever; you want to have good days and nothing but good days and best days ever, but your god is unapproachable. What do you do? You could do what people have been doing for thousands of years. You could take a piece of wood, carve it, name it, pray to it, and now you have an approachable god. Or you could do what people have been doing for almost as long. You take a sheep, a goat, a cow, a virgin and you sacrifice to your god, and now you have an approachable god. Or you could do something less bloody; you do something nice, or you promise to do something nice; and you hope that now you have an approachable god. What are you thinking? “None of those ideas sound all that good.” You’re right. So you could do what people have been doing ever since the Garden of Eden. You decide you don’t like the way God thinks, that your self can think better than God, your self has better answers than God, your self is more agreeable to you than God, and so you make your self to be your god. But there’s a problem with that, isn’t there? Setting your self up as god might give you an approachable god, some days maybe even an agreeable god, but not a god who can save you from your worst days ever.

The way to have an approachable god is not to fashion one from wood or stone, silver or gold. The way to have an approachable god is not to fashion a god out of self. The way to have an approachable god is not to bribe God. The only true way to have an approachable god is to recognize who the true God is. He's the Creator who has packed just a smidge of his power into the atoms that can destroy more than tons of dynamite, and he has created you and me to be his. He's the Righteous One, the Judge who determines right and wrong; the Righteous Judge who rules that anything other than Right, anything less than Right is unacceptable, and he's the Righteous One who wants for you and has for you a life made right. He's the all glorious, all holy God who shines so bright with glory that even his holy angels hide their faces.

Before that God all we can do is tremble and fear and fall on our faces; before that God all we can do is beg for mercy; before that God all we can expect is death - the soul that sins, it shall die - no one can see God and live.

But the all creating God, the all righteous God, the all holy and glorious God wants better for you than death and hell. He wants life for you; he wants life with you. He wants you to have life with him, not just the dying life we endure here in this world, but life the way it's supposed to be, life made right with him in heaven.

And so God has made himself approachable. Through his Son, God wrapped himself into a tiny package; he wrapped himself into the softest skin; he wrapped himself into the body of a baby - cooing and smiling and reaching out. He wrapped himself into Jesus. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, he was born of the virgin Mary. The all-creating, all-holy, all-glorious Son of God was born into our sinful world as a tender, helpless baby who needed to be fed and burped, wiped and washed. God made himself approachable, someone who could be seen and held, loveable. Then, in Jesus, God showed himself approachable; he showed his love and care - healing the sick, not just from a distance, but reaching out and touching the untouchable leper. In Jesus, God showed himself approachable - not just for the in-crowd, not just for those in power, in the money, in the right crowd, but in Jesus God showed himself approachable to those this world pushes down and pushes away. In Jesus, God made himself and shows himself approachable.

But that's not all. In Jesus, God made us approachable. God took our sin, our disgusting depravity; God took the sin and guilt that would have us judged and condemned and banished from before God. God took our sin and guilt and put it on Jesus, judged him, condemned him, banished him ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me."). Jesus so completely paid for our sin and satisfied God's judgment, that God raised him back to life as right. What does that mean for you

and me? With Jesus, baptized into Jesus, God sees you covered and connected with Jesus, as right as Jesus. And you know what the Father says about Jesus - "You are my Son whom I love, with you I am well pleased." What does that mean for you? With Jesus, God sees you as approachable - not just with a stick, but with open arms and a hug.

Now, instead of having to live in fear of God; now, instead of wanting or needing to fashion our self to be our god; now, we get to approach the all-creating God knowing he has what it takes to help us; we get to approach the all-holy, all Righteous God, knowing he will make life right for us; we get to approach the all-glorious God knowing that when he comes for us, his glory won't crisp us or fry us, but his glory will have us shining with glory in heaven.

A Happy Holiday can't give us that hope. A Festivus can't give us that peace. An unapproachable god wouldn't give us that hope or peace. But look at God, your God, in the baby Jesus. Look at God, your God, in the Good Shepherd Jesus. Look at God, your God, in Jesus, and you get to see an approachable God - the God who gives you himself. In Him, you get to have hope and peace, life and love; you get to live life made right - together with God forever. Amen.

Christmas Day

December 25, 2024

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

From Heaven Above – Wilbur Held

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)

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!

O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!

Come and behold him, born the King of angels:

Refrain

O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,

O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

God from true God, and Light from Light eternal,

born of a virgin, to earth he comes!

Only-begotten Son of God the Father: *Refrain*

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;

Jesus, to thee be all glory giv'n!

Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing: *Refrain*

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. *Psalm 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.** *Psalm 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!

Psalm 113:2

HYMN

“To Shepherds as They Watched by Night”

Hymn 335 (v. 2-6)

“At Bethlehem, in David’s town, as Micah did of old make known.

It is the Christ, your Lord and King, who will to all salvation bring.”

O then rejoice that through his Son God is with sinners now at one;

made like yourselves of flesh and blood, your brother is th’ eternal God.

What harm can sin and death then do? The true God now abides with you.

Let hell and Satan storm and rave, Christ is your brother—you are safe.

Not one he will or can forsake; his promise he will never break.

Let ev’ry scheme the tempter try, you may his utmost pow’rs defy.

You shall and must at last prevail; God’s own you are, you cannot fail.

To God forever sing your praise with joy and patience all your days.

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.

Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."

And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."

Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."

HYMN

"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"
Hymn 350

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

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

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

EPISTLE 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

Of the Father's love begotten ere the worlds began to be,
he is Alpha and Omega, he the source, the ending he,
of the things that are, that have been, and that future years shall see
evermore and evermore.

Oh, that birth forever blessed when the virgin, full of grace,
by the Holy Ghost conceiving, bore the Savior of our race,
and the babe, the world's Redeemer, first revealed his sacred face
evermore and evermore.

This is he whom seers and sages sang of old with one accord,
whom the voices of the prophets promised in their faithful word.
Now he shines, the long-expected; let creation praise its Lord
evermore and evermore.

Let the heights of heav'n adore him, angel hosts his praises sing,
pow'rs, dominions bow before him and extol our God and King.
Let no tongue on earth be silent, ev'ry voice in concert ring
evermore and evermore.

Christ, to thee, with God the Father, and, O Holy Ghost, to thee
hymn and chant and high thanksgiving and unending praises be,
honor, glory, and dominion and eternal victory evermore and evermore.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Romans 8:31–32

Alleluia! What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us,
who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for
us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?
Alleluia!

GOSPEL LESSON

John 1:1-18

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

"All My Heart Again Rejoices"

Hymn 329

All my heart again rejoices as I hear far and near sweetest angel voices.
"Christ is born!" their choirs are singing till the air ev'rywhere
now with joy is ringing.

Hear! The conqueror has spoken: "Now the foe, sin and woe,
death and hell are broken!"
God is man, man to deliver, and the Son now is one with our blood forever.

Should we fear our God's displeasure, who, to save, freely gave
his most precious treasure?
To redeem us he has given his own Son from the throne of his might in heaven.

See the Lamb, our sin once taking to the cross, suff'ring loss,
full atonement making.
For our life his own he tenders, and his grace all our race fit for glory renders.

Softly from his lowly manger Jesus calls one and all, "You are safe from danger.
Children, from the sins that grieve you you are freed; all you need
I will surely give you."

Come, then, banish all your sadness! One and all, great and small,
come with songs of gladness; we shall live with him forever there on high
in that joy which will vanish never.

SERMON

HYMN

"From Heaven Above to Earth I Come"

Hymn 331 vs. 7-9, 13-15

Come here, my friends, lift up your eyes, and see what in the manger lies.
Who is this child, so young and fair? It is the Christ Child lying there.

Welcome to earth, O noble Guest, through whom the sinful world is blest!
You came to share my misery, that you might share your joy with me.

Ah, Lord, though you created all, how weak you are, so poor and small,
that you should choose to lay your head where lowly cattle lately fed!

Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child, prepare a bed, soft, undefiled
within my heart, made clean and new, a quiet chamber kept for you.

My heart for very joy must leap; my lips no more can silence keep.
I too must sing with joyful tongue that sweetest ancient cradle song:

Glory to God in highest heav'n, who unto us his Son has giv'n,
while angels sing with pious mirth a glad new year to all the earth!

OFFERING – A Gift for Our Savior

If you prefer to give online, the code at the right will take you to our Online Giving page. We invite our online givers to join in our offering with an "I Give Online" card in the pew racks.



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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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."