

UNTO YOU IS BORN A SAVIOR

Luke 2:1-20

Christmas Eve

December 24, 2024

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel for Christmas Eve comes from *The Gospel According to Luke*, chapter 2, verses 1 through 20. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Luke 2, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who 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 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told 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 they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are two basic doctrines of Christmas, which the angel proclaimed to shepherds in the field. And the angel's sermon is recorded for us too, because we also must believe these doctrines.

First, you must believe that God came in human flesh. You must believe that this child, who was born of the Virgin Mary, is a real human being. And you must also believe that he is no

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ordinary human being. He is, at the same time, the eternal Son of God. This humble infant is the eternal Word through whom God spoke the world and all things into existence.

But as we consider the events recorded in Luke's gospel, we see a very human story. It's amazing how simply Luke reports the event of Jesus' birth.

In the Old Testament, Micah prophesied that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). This was God's plan, and so God led Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. We might have expected something supernatural to lead them there. But the circumstances recorded are so simple and natural. It was so ... ordinary. There was a census. Caesar Augustus, the pagan ruler of the ancient world, wanted money. So he decreed a census, so that he could also collect taxes. Thus, he had the entire empire registered. Now I don't suppose Caesar Augustus had any idea that God would use his census to fulfill prophecy. But since Joseph was from house and lineage of David, he took his betrothed with him to David's hometown to be registered. And so, in obedience to the Roman Empire, Joseph brings this young woman, who is carrying God in her belly, to the village Micah had prophesied of.

"And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger" (2:6-7). Here the eternal Son of God takes his first breath with his human lungs.

Stop and think about that. Let that sink in. God's first human cry rings out. And with these human nostrils he smells the livestock he created. And for the first time, God's human flesh is wrapped up in swaddling clothes.

And then Mary took this tiny little human and laid him in a manger. She put the eternal Son of God in a feeding trough for animals. It's the best she had. Mary treated God like a human being, because he was; he *is*. She treated God as if he were her poor child, because he is. If you were holding God in your hands, what would you do with him?

One of the ancient church fathers says this:

"He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities (Is 53:5). It should be carefully noted that the sign given of the saviour's birth is not a child enfolded in Tyrian purple, but one wrapped round with rough pieces of cloth; he is not to be found in an ornate golden bed, but in a manger. The meaning of this is that he did not merely take upon himself our lowly mortality, but for our sakes took upon himself the clothing of the poor. Though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, so that by his poverty we might become rich (cf. 2 Cor 8:9); though he was Lord of heaven, he became a poor man on earth, to teach those who lived on earth that by poverty of spirit they might win the kingdom of heaven" (The Venerable Bede).

The Christmas story is so human that it actually sounds kind of blasphemous. Saint Luke, the evangelist who penned this story, was a medical doctor. But he doesn't record any special medical anomalies about the birth of Jesus. It was a normal human birth. The conception was supernatural, and Luke records that; Mary was a virgin (1:26-38), and virgins do not conceive children. That was a medical anomaly. But when it comes to the birth, there is nothing supernatural for the doctor to report, because even though this child was conceived by the Holy Spirit, he is very, very human, and he was born the normal way.

When we try to imagine it, sometimes we assume there must have been some special supernatural signs at his birth. In artistic representations we see light beaming from this infant child. But Luke records no beams of light. It was an ordinary human birth. Martin Luther said in one of his Christmas sermons, "Had the shepherds not heard from the angels that Christ was lying there, they might have looked at him a thousand and another thousand times and yet they

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would not have found out from that that the child was Christ” (“The Gospel for Christmas Eve;” *AE:52, 22*). Without that angelic visitation, those very shepherds might have walked by the manger the next morning, looked down, and thought, *poor kid*, and never given him another thought.

Christmas is vitally important to Christian theology, because this stage in Jesus’ life emphasizes the fullness of his humanity like no other stage can. He submitted himself to being absolutely helpless. The eternal Son of God became a human baby. He became so human, that God needed a mommy. He cried. He pooped in his swaddling clothes. He nursed at his mother’s breast. He slept during the day, and he probably woke his parents up in the middle of the night. This is what human babies do, so this is what God did.

He was “born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law” (Gal. 4:4-5), so he experienced all the things normal human beings do when they are under the law and the curse of death. From conception to death, he did all the things normal human beings do, only without sin (Heb. 4:15).

God became man, a real human being. From conception to death he experienced all the things you and I experience. He suffered all the things you and I suffer. But he did all this without sin.

And you must believe this. If you wish to be saved, you must believe that God became man. You must believe that the eternal Son of God, through whom God created all things, took on human flesh. You must believe that the true God became a true man, and that he continues to be both true God and true man.

This is necessary if he is to be any kind of Savior to the human race. On the one hand, he must be true man, otherwise he could not stand as a representative for humanity. And on the other hand, he must be true God, otherwise his life would not be valuable enough to atone for the sins of the world.

Imagine a scale, you know, the old kind you used in science class where you put an object on one side, and then you put some weights on the other side to balance it. Well, on one side of this scale, we put the entire sin of all humanity. This is a heavy weight. And on the other side we put the sacrifice of a sinless human being: Jesus. If Jesus is a perfect human being, but not the true God, the scales do not move. The righteousness of one human being cannot outweigh the sin of all humanity (Ezek. 14:14-16). But as soon as we put the divinity of Jesus onto the scale, as soon as God enters the balance, the scales shift, because we’re not just talking about the sacrifice of a sinless man; we’re talking about the death of the God who created the universe and everything in it. This is infinite value and infinite righteousness.

It was for this reason that God became man. The Son of God took on human flesh with one thing in mind: death.

And so you must believe that this child, who was born of the Virgin Mary, is the true God in human flesh.

This is the first doctrine from the angel’s announcement that you must believe.

And the second doctrine you must believe are the words, “Unto you” (2:11).

“And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord’ ” (2:8-11).

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This is the first Christmas sermon, and I don't think a better one has ever been preached. *Fear not. Good news. Great joy. A Savior.* And like every good sermon, the angel personalized it. He said, "Unto you ..."

"*Unto you* is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." This is the most wonderful and beautiful announcement.

But who are shepherds that they should receive this message? Why proclaim the glad tidings out here in a field? Why not proclaim it in Jerusalem, in the temple even? Why not tell it to kings and queens? Why not proclaim it to the priests and the Pharisees? Why not tell the rabbis? Maybe then they would have believed thirty years later when Jesus divided Israel by his teaching and works, but probably not. Still, why shepherds?

There was nothing special about them. They had an ordinary and dirty occupation. They spent many of their nights sitting in a field. In many ways, shepherds were outcasts from society. They sometimes had a reputation for being dishonest, and they were unclean according to the ceremonial law (Stein, 108). Why should they be worthy to receive the first, and best, Christmas sermon?

I think the angel was sent to them precisely because they were outcasts and sinners. These were those sinners that God took on human flesh to save. If the angel had gone to kings, priests, and Pharisees, would they have even cared? Do you care? Or do you feel like you have everything you need without him? Christ came for the humble. So the angel goes to these shepherds out in the field and preaches the good news. "*Unto you* ..." Out of all the people the angel could have appeared to, God sent him to these shepherds to show the whole world that when he says, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for *all* people," he means it. God sends the angel to the shepherds in order to comfort *your* conscience, to illustrate to *you* that "all people" really does mean "all people."

On our prideful days, we're tempted to believe that God's goodness is reserved for people who are at least relatively decent. And we all probably have an image in our mind of what we consider a decent person to be. We also have an image of what we consider a less-than-decent person to be. And on our prideful days, we are tempted to believe that we are the decent people, and God's goodness is reserved for decent people like us.

On our more despairing days, we are still tempted to believe that God's goodness is reserved for decent people, but we think that we are not among them. This is a more honest assessment of ourselves, but we're still wrong about who God's goodness is for. The angel proclaims "good news of great joy that will be for *all* people." And the angel goes to shepherds to illustrate that "all people" really does mean "all people."

So the second doctrine you must believe from the angel's sermon is these two little words: "*Unto you.*"

When the apostle Paul teaches, "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4-5), he is talking about *you*. God sent forth his son for *you*!

When the angel said to the shepherds, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for *all* people," it means the next line is not just for the shepherds. It means the next line is for you. It means this first, and greatest, Christmas sermon is yours. It is a sermon to all people, and to every person.

As you hear these words, and as you read these words, know that the angel is speaking them to you. The angel of the Lord says to you, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Faith clings to these two little words: "*Unto you.*"

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Christ's birth is for you. Christ's life is for you. His death is for you. His resurrection is for you. His Kingdom in glory is for you. All of this is *for* you.

You were born in sin and guilt, so Christ gives to you his birth. You have lived in sin and rebellion against God, so Christ gives to you his perfect life. You live under the curse of death, and you are doomed to die, so Christ gives to you his innocent sufferings and death. And you will return to the dust, so Christ gives to you his resurrection from the dead and ascension to the right hand of God. This is what it means that he is your Savior.

This is what these two little words, "Unto you," mean. The Son of God comes to us in weakness and humility. He comes as one of us to take on our frailty. He takes on our sin. He bears our curse. He takes all we have, and he gives to us all that he is and all that he does.

Your sin becomes his. And his righteousness becomes yours.

His innocent birth becomes your birth. His perfect life becomes your life. His death becomes yours. And his resurrection becomes yours.

This is Christmas. This is the Gospel of what Jesus has done for us. And it is all wrapped up in these two little words: "Unto you."

"Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.