

The Festival of Christmas Eve
24 December 2013
Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

**“God was Born of the Virgin St. Mary
to Give Men Re-Birth Unto Life Eternal
through Holy Baptism.”**

Who [Christ] gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity,
and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.¹

Titus 2:14

Introduction

What is the point of God being born of the Virgin St. Mary? Obviously, the it's not done for God's sake. God has no need of any human experience, including human birth. So, what is the point of God undergoing a human birth? The answer is, obviously, for our sakes and the sake of all men God undertook to be born of a woman.²

Because of the fall of Adam, all men suffer a sinful conception and birth.³ The sad result of such a lethal conception and birth is that all men perish if there be no intervention.

¹Amplification in brackets added.

²“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” **Galatians 4:4-5.**

³“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned...” **Romans 5:12.** “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” **Psalms 51:5.**

But God did intervene. God undertook to be born of the Virgin St. Mary in order to enjoy a holy conception⁴ and pure human birth for us. From the beginning of His life and throughout His entire life, death, and resurrection, Christ undertook to live and did live a pure and holy life⁵ for us so that we would gain a pure and holy life forever pleasing to God⁶ and, thereby, gain life eternal and the resurrection of the body on the last day.

This Blessed Work in our behalf and in behalf of all men Christ gives to us through the Gift of the Blessed Waters of Holy Baptism. Because Holy Baptism is God's Saving Gospel⁷, Holy Baptism Gives the Gift of Christ's Pure Conception, Live Birth, and Holy Life for us and we enjoy re-birth⁸ unto life everlasting and the resurrection of the body.

⁴“But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.” **St. Matthew 1:20.**

⁵“Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.” **Psalm 24:3-4.**

⁶“For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” **II Corinthians 5:21.**

⁷God's Word and Sacraments are what Scripture means by the Gospel. “But let us speak of the word *liturgy*. This word does not properly signify a sacrifice, but rather the public ministry, and agrees aptly with our belief, namely, that one minister who consecrates tenders the body and blood of the Lord to the rest of the people, just as one minister who preaches tenders the Gospel to the people, as Paul says, I Cor. 4, 1: *Let a man so account of us as the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, i.e. of the Gospel and the Sacraments.* And 2 Cor. 5, 20: *We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in God's stead, be ye reconciled to God.* Thus the term *leitourgia* agrees aptly with the ministry.” *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV. (XII.): Of the Mass, Of the Term Mass.* 80, 81, *Triglotta*, p. 411.

⁸“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” **St. John 3:5.**

I. God was Born of the Virgin St. Mary not for His Sake but for the Sake of All Men to Give them Re-Birth unto Life Eternal.

A. All men suffer spiritually a lethal conception and still birth because of man's sin.

Spiritually, all men suffer a still birth because of our sinful conception given to us by Adam. While we all look quite normal and healthy at birth, spiritually, we are dead in trespass and sin. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins....⁹

Because of the fall of Adam, all men are conceived and born and sin, an eternally deadly condition. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned....¹⁰

David writes:

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.¹¹

Because of Adam's sin, all men suffer, spiritually, a lethal conception and still birth that goes on forever.

B. Christ was born to provide men a pure conception and re-birth unto life eternal.

Obviously, man is in need of assistance because he comes into existence at his conception fatally flawed. Because man's problem lies at the core and beginning of his being, he cannot help himself but must be delivered from this lethal conception and still birth. It is for this

⁹**Ephesians 2:1.**

¹⁰**Romans 5:12.**

¹¹**Psalms 51:5.**

reason that God became man. God undertook to be born of a woman in order to deliver men from their lethal conception and still birth because of sin. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.¹²

Thus we see that God undertook to be born of the Virgin St. Mary not for His sake – *for He is the Creator who has no need of the experiences of the creature of conception and birth* – but rather for the sake of all men in order to give all men a pure conception and birth in order to deliver them from their sinful conception and consequent still birth. Luther writes:

Christ is born for you and ... his birth is yours, and come to pass for your benefit. For the Gospel teaches that Christ was born for our sake and that he did everything and suffered all things for our sake Christ has a pure, innocent, holy birth. Man has an impure, sinful, damned birth, as David says in Psalm 51[:5] There is simply no remedy for this except through the pure birth of Christ. ... Christ willed to be born so that we might be born in different manner.... In this manner Christ takes to himself our birth and absorbs it in his birth; he presents us with his birth so that we become pure and new in it, as if it were our own, so that every Christian might rejoice in this birth of Christ and glory in it no less than if he, too, like Christ, had been born bodily of Mary.¹³

This Birth, St. Paul notes, takes place under the law, i.e. the Commandments of God. Christ, therefore, from His conception in the Blessed Womb of the Virgin St. Mary kept God's commandments for us, worshiping God perfectly from the womb. David writes in **Psalm 22** of Christ keeping the First Commandment, and, therefore, all of the commandments of God, for us from the womb for us:

But thou *art* he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope *when I was* upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly.¹⁴

¹²**Galatians 4:4-5.**

¹³*Luther's Works*, Vol. 52, pp. 14, 15.

¹⁴**Psalm 22:9-10**, underscore added.

Christ's keeping God's commandments for us perfectly we learned in catechism is called Christ's *Active Obedience*:

As my *Priest*, Christ *fulfilled the Law* in my stead perfectly (active obedience), *sacrificed Himself* for me (passive obedience), and still *intercedes* (pleads) for me with His heavenly Father.¹⁵

The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes on this Blessed Work of Christ for us:

This teaching of Scripture [of Christ's Active Obedience for us] is of great practical importance. In his life of faith the Christian continually resorts to Christ's vicarious fulfillment of the Law. Luther: "He satisfied the Law; He fulfilled the Law perfectly, for He loved God with all His heart, and with all His soul, and with all His strength, and with all His mind, and He loved His neighbor as Himself. Therefore, when the Law comes and accuses you of not having kept it, bid it go to Christ. Say: There is the Man who has kept it; He fulfilled it for me and gave His fulfillment to me. Thus the Law is silenced."¹⁶

From the womb and throughout His life, Christ loved God and neighbor perfectly for us. Christ's entire life, waking and sleeping, was living a perfect and holy for us. Jesus says:

Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.¹⁷

Giving His life a ransom includes also Christ's death on the Cross for our sins, purifying us of any stain of sin. Now nothing remains to corrupt our conception and birth and everything positive exists to give us a pure birth and a holy life brimming with eternal meaning. For this purpose Christ was born, lived, died, and rose again from the dead on the Third Day. By giving Himself for us, He sanctified our lives from the beginning stretching into eternity. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

¹⁵*The Small Catechism*, question 132 B, p. 108.

¹⁶The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 375.

¹⁷**St. Matthew 20:28.**

Who [Christ] gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.¹⁸

II. Christ Gave Himself to Give Men Re-Birth unto Life Eternal through the Gospel.

A. Christ Gave Himself to give men re-birth through Holy Baptism, i.e. the Gospel.

Moreover, *Christ gave Himself in order to bring to each and every man that Gift of re-birth right to his doorstep through the Gospel.* The Apostle St. Paul writes:

... Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.¹⁹

In other words, *Christ died on the Cross in order to deliver to us His Pure Conception and Live Birth through Holy Baptism, i.e. the Gospel*²⁰. By His Passion, Christ fashioned the waters of Holy Baptism to sanctify, save, and give the Gift of re-birth and life eternal. Luther writes:

[H]oly baptism was purchased for us through this same blood, which was shed for us and with which he paid for sin. This blood and its merit and power he put into

¹⁸**Titus 2:14.**

¹⁹**Ephesians 5:25, 26-27**, underscore added.

²⁰God's Word and Sacraments are the Gospel. "But let us speak of the word *liturgy*. This word does not properly signify a sacrifice, but rather the public ministry, and agrees aptly with our belief, namely, that one minister who consecrates tenders the body and blood of the Lord to the rest of the people, just as one minister who preaches tenders the Gospel to the people, as Paul says, I Cor. 4, 1: *Let a man so account of us as the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, i.e. of the Gospel and the Sacraments.* And 2 Cor. 5, 20: *We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in God's stead, be ye reconciled to God.* Thus the term *leitourgia* agrees aptly with the ministry." *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV. (XII.): Of the Mass, Of the Term Mass.* 80, 81, *Triglotta*, p. 411.

baptism, in order that in baptism we might receive it. For whenever a person receives baptism in faith this is the same as if he were visibly washed and cleansed with the blood of Christ. For we do not attain the forgiveness of sins through our work, but rather through the death and the shedding of the blood of the Son of God. *But he takes this forgiveness of sin and tucks it into baptism.*²¹

This re-birth in Christ is given to men through the Gospel, God's Word and Sacraments. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.²²

And this faith created by God's Word the Gospel saves and gives life eternal. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.²³

Jesus says:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.²⁴

²¹*Luther's Works*, Vol. 51, p. 325. "This Baptism is also founded upon the name of Christ ... because it was purchased by Christ's vicarious satisfaction, as Eph. 5:26 expressly teaches, 'Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it ..., that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.'" The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 259.

²²**Roman 10:17.**

²³**Ephesians 2:8-10.**

²⁴**St. John 17:3.**

Luther writes of this Saving Knowledge of God:

Concerning this knowledge and its power the prophets have spoken gloriously and clearly prophesied, as in Isaiah 53[:11]: “By knowledge of Him shall He (My Servant, the Righteous One) make many just or righteous.” This means: “He will redeem them from sins and snatch them from the devil’s jaws solely through this; that they know Him and who He is.” ... Likewise, Jeremiah 9[:23-24] says: “Let no one boast of his wisdom nor of his might nor of his riches” – in short, let no one boast at all – “but if anyone wants to boast, let him boast in this, that he knows Me and knows who I am: the Lord, who does good and establishes righteousness and justice on earth.”²⁵

Men enjoy re-birth to life eternal spiritually, i.e. through God’s Word and Sacraments. The Apostle St. John writes:

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.²⁶

The Lutheran Church confesses:

For neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe on Him, and obtain Him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the gospel. The work is done and accomplished; for Christ has acquired and gained the treasure for us by His suffering, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained concealed so that no one knew of it, then it would be in vain and lost. That this treasure, therefore, might not lie buried, but be appropriated and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to go forth and be proclaimed, in which He gives the Holy Ghost to bring this treasure home and appropriate it to us. Therefore sanctifying is nothing else than bringing us to Christ to receive this good, to which we could not attain of ourselves.²⁷

²⁵Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 69, pp. 35, 36.

²⁶**St. John 3:5**, underscore added.

²⁷*The Large Catechism, Part Second, Of The Creed, Article III.38-39, Triglotta*, 689.

Luther writes:

Christ is born for you and that birth is yours, and come to pass for your benefit. For the Gospel teaches that Christ was born for your sake and that he did everything and suffered all things for our sake, just as the angel says here: “I announce to you a great joy which will come to all people; for to you is born this day a Savior who is Christ the Lord” [Luke 2:10-11]. From these words you see clearly that he was born for us. ... He does not simply say: “Christ is born,” but: “*for you* is he born.” Again, he does not say: “I announce a joy,” but: “*to you* do I announce a great joy.” Again, this joy will not remain in Christ but is for all people. ... Christ has a pure, innocent, holy birth. Man has an impure, sinful damned birth, as David says in Psalm 51[:5]: “Behold, in sin am I fashioned in the womb, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” There is no remedy for this except through the pure birth of Christ. Now the birth of Christ cannot be distributed physically, even as that would not be of any help either. For this reason it is distributed spiritually, by means of the word, to everyone, as the angel says, so that all who firmly believe that it is given to them in this manner shall not be harmed by their impure birth; this is the manner and means to become cleansed from the stain of the birth we have from miserable Adam. Christ willed to be born so that we might be born in different manner, as he says in John 3[:3-6]. This happens through that faith, as James 1[:8] says: “He has born us of his own will through his word of truth, so that we might become pure and new in it, as if it were our own, so that every Christian might rejoice in this birth of Christ and glory in it no less than if he, too, like Christ, had been born bodily of Mary. ... Therefore see to it that you derive from the Gospel not only enjoyment of the story as such, for that does not last long. Nor should you derive from it only an example, for that does not hold up without faith. But see to it that you make his birth your own, and that you make an exchange with him, so that you rid yourself of your birth and receive, instead, his. This happens, if you have this faith. By this token you sit assuredly in the Virgin Mary’s lap and are her dear child. ... This is the great joy, of which the angel speaks, this is the consolation and the superabundant goodness of God, that man (if he has this faith) may boast of such treasure as that Mary is his real mother, Christ his brother, and God his father.”²⁸

B. Re-birth through the Gospel yields life everlasting.

Through the Gospel, Christ gives to men re-birth unto life everlasting. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

²⁸*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 52, pp. 14, 15, 16.

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.²⁹

The Lutheran Church confesses:

Therefore every Christian has enough in Baptism to learn and to practise all his life; for he has always enough to do to believe firmly what it promises and brings: victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, the grace of God, the entire Christ, and the Holy Ghost with His gifts. In short, it is so transcendent that if timid nature could realize it, it might well doubt whether it could be true. For consider, if there were somewhere a physician who understood the art of saving men from dying, or, even though they died, of restoring them speedily to life, so that they would thereafter live forever, how the world would pour in money like snow and rain, so that because of the throng of the rich no one could find access! But here in Baptism there is brought free to every one's door such a treasure and medicine as utterly destroys death and preserves all men alive.³⁰

In the Gospel, then, we have the Gift of the Fountain of Eternal Youth. Luther writes:

The second part, God's Word beside and with the water, which is not something we have invented or dreamed up, but is rather the Word of Christ, who said, "Go into all the world and baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" [Matt. 28:19]. When these words are added to the water, then it is no longer simple water like other water, but a holy, divine, blessed water. For where the Word of God, by which he created heaven and earth and all things, is present, there God himself is present with his power and might. ... Therefore it is such a potent fountain of youth that it causes a man to be born again, washes away and drowns every sin within him.³¹

²⁹**Titus 3:4-7**, underscore added.

³⁰*The Large Catechism, Part Fourth, Of Baptism.*41-43, *Triglotta*, p. 743.

³¹*Luther's Works*, Vol. 52, pp. 320, 328, underscore added.

The Gospel is the Great Gift of Christmas because the Gospel gives to men re-birth unto life everlasting and the resurrection of the body and all the treasures and glories of heaven.

Conclusion

The Great Gift of Christmas is the Gospel, the Fountain of Eternal Youth. Through the Gospel God gives to us the Gift of Life Eternal He won for us by His conception, birth, life, death, and resurrection from the dead for us. For God was not born of the Virgin St. Mary for His sake, but rather for ours, in order to give to us a pure conception, live birth, life eternal, and the resurrection of the body.

Where we have the Fountain of Eternal Youth, there we have all the inestimable gifts of God both now and stretching into eternity

Amen.