

**The Festival of Christmas**  
25 December 2014  
*Concordia Lutheran Mission*  
Terrebonne, Oregon

## **“God is Born to Men to Save and Give Life Eternal.”**

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

### **Isaiah 9:6**

#### **Introduction**

On Christmas we learn again that God was born to us and became man to give us life eternal. Isaiah teaches us that Christ was born to father us into life eternal by His Passion.

Christ also fashioned by His Passion the Gift of Holy Baptism. Through Holy Baptism Christ gives to us the Gift of Life Eternal won for us by His Passion.

God was born of the Virgin St. Mary and became man in Jesus Christ in order to save from sin and give life eternal through the Gift of Holy Baptism.

#### **I. Christ is Born to Men to Save and Give Life Eternal.**

##### **A. Christ is born “unto us” because of man’s sin.**

The prophet Isaiah writes that Christ is born “unto us”. In other words, Christ is born for us and for our sakes. For what reason is Christ born for us? Christ is born for us because we suffer from a fatally flawed conception and birth. David writes:

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.<sup>1</sup>

All men are conceived in sin and born to die because of the fall of Adam. 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....<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>**Psalm 51:5.**

<sup>2</sup>**Romans 5:12.**

Because man is born into this terrible condition, fatally flawed from the outset, God was born of the Virgin St. Mary and became man in order to deliver men from this sinful conception and birth unto death. 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.<sup>3</sup>

Luther writes of the Birth of Christ for us:

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[:18] says: “He has born us of his own will through his word of truth, so that we begin to be his new creation.” 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. ... 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,

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<sup>3</sup>Galatians 4:4-5.

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.<sup>4</sup>

**B. Christ saves from sin and gives life eternal because He is the Merciful and Almighty God in the flesh.**

Such a task is obviously too great for any one man. No man can atone for his own sins let alone the sins of all men. So this One Man, Jesus Christ, is also the True, Almighty God because He atones for the sins of all men. The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes:

Miserable man had angered the infinite God with his sin; therefore, he fell into an infinite evil. Such an infinite evil could be paid for and removed in no other way than with the infinite Good. Now then, apart from God nothing is infinitely good. That's why God became man, so that man be enabled to pay on the strength of the infinite divinity, so that this divine payment avail for the benefit of man on account of the personal union, and so that divine righteousness adequately accomplish this. This is the wondrous accomplishment of divine righteousness and mercy.<sup>5</sup>

The prophet Isaiah teaches this Wondrous Work and Mercy of God in his several descriptions of Christ our Savior. The prophet calls His Name "Wonderful". This Name first appears in the narrative of Samson's parents. In the book of Judges we read:

And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name *was* Manoah; and his wife *was* barren, and bare not. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou *art* barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. ... And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What *is* thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour? And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it *is* [Wonderful]. So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered *it* upon a rock unto the LORD: and *the angel* did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on. For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on *it* and fell on their faces to the ground. But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he *was* an angel of the LORD. And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God. But his wife said unto him, If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he

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<sup>4</sup>*Luther's Works*, Vol. 52, pp. 14, 15, 16.

<sup>5</sup>The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard, *Seven Christmas Sermons*, p. 37.

have shewed us all these *things*, nor would as at this time have told us *such things* as these.<sup>6</sup>

Christ's Name is Wonderful because He created and sustains the wonders of creation.<sup>7</sup> Christ also manifested His Power when He, the Angel of the LORD, as Manoah identified Him, delivered the people from Egyptian tyranny. *The Abiding Word* sums up this glorious work and wondrous history of Christ in the time of Moses:

Jesus appears as God on the pages of the Old Testament. He reveals Himself under such titles as "the Angel of the Lord," "Jehovah," "Lord," etc. Whenever in the Old Testament the name "Lord" occurs, it is pre-eminently not the Father, nor the Holy Spirit, but the Son of God. Ex. 13:21 Moses writes of the Israelites in the wilderness: "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light." Who is this "Lord"? Ch. 14:19 He is called "the Angel of God," which is a well-known appellation of Jesus in the Old Testament. Here the Angel of God is directly termed "Lord." All doubt is removed by Paul (I Cor. 10:3-4): "Our fathers did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; *and that Rock was Christ.*" ... Which person of the Godhead summoned Moses to the summit of Mount Sinai and gave him the two tables of the Law? Again it was the Son of God. The evidence is presented in the Ascension Psalm 68; vv. 7-8, and 17-18. And all doubt is excluded by Heb. 12:18-26, especially v. 24. ... Luther writes: "The God who led Israel out of Egypt and through the Red Sea; who went before them in a pillar of a cloud and of fire; who nourished them with bread from heaven and did all the miracles which Moses relates in his books; again, who brought them into the land of Canaan and gave them kings and the priesthood and

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<sup>6</sup>**Judges 13:2-3, 17-22**, translation from the Hebrew in brackets is mine. "First of all, Isaiah calls this little Child which is born to us: **Wonderful**. This Name is taken from the book of Judges 13:18. There the angel of the Lord Himself appears to the wife of Manoah and announces to her the birth of Samson. This same angel was the Son of God, the Angel of the great counsel – as the seventy translators [of the Septuagint] have in this case rendered this reference of Isaiah, where He Himself is called God. When Manoah asks for the name of this angel, he answers: **Why do you ask for my name, which, of course, is Wondrous?**" The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard, *Seven Christmas Sermons (1613)*, tr. Elemer M. Hohle, ed. David O. Berger, Decatur, IL: The Johann Gerhard Institute, first edition, November 1996, pp. 72, 73.

<sup>7</sup>"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." **St. John 1:1-3, 14.**

everything, is this God and none other than Jesus of Nazareth, Mary's, the Virgin's, Son, whom we Christians call our God and Lord ... . Again, He it is who on Mountain Sinai gives Moses the Ten Commandments ... Yes, Jesus of Nazareth, who died for us on the cross is the God who says in the First Commandment: 'I, the Lord, am thy God.' ... ." So then, the same God on Sinai and Calvary. What comfort for the believers! Now the flames of Sinai can no longer fill us with terror. Indeed, we daily transgress the holy Law of Sinai, but we break through its condemnation and flee to the Redeemer on Calvary, who Himself fulfilled the Law for us and paid its penalty."<sup>8</sup>

More importantly, Christ is Wonderful because He performs the Wonder and Miracle of Salvation from sin through His Blessed Life for us and Death on the Cross. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.<sup>9</sup>

The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes of the Tremendous Wonder of Salvation in Christ:

It is God who alone effects true conversion, God who so changes (renews, transforms) the human heart that it disavows all its own work and trust in the grace proclaimed in the Gospel. For that reason Luther calls God's working of faith in man "a work so great as if He created heaven and earth anew" (St. L. IX:972).<sup>10</sup>

Next, the prophet Isaiah calls Christ "Counselor" because He is privy to the inner workings of the Godhead and re-creates men in the Image of God, from which man fell in the Garden of Eden, and, therefore, can let us know what the Intentions of the Holy Trinity are. This Revelation of the Intention of the Holy Trinity toward fallen man He makes known in the Gospel. The will of the Holy Trinity the angels sang on the night of Christ's Birth when these heavenly armies (host) sang the Gospel to the shepherds and to all men:

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<sup>8</sup>The Rev. Louis E. Roehm, *The Abiding Word*, Vol. 1, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1946, pp. 20, 21.

<sup>9</sup>**I Timothy 3:16.**

<sup>10</sup>*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 458.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.<sup>11</sup>

The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes in one of his Christmas sermons:

The reason why this Child, this Son, is also called **Counselor** is that He, in counsel with [other persons of] the Holy Trinity, helped reach the conclusion how fallen mankind could be helped again. The unending righteousness of God was offended by the Fall of Adam. Now then, there was only an unending payment required, which neither angel nor man could provide. Therefore there was no counsel either in heaven or upon earth. Thus, the Son of God, the eternal Wisdom, came up with the counsel<sup>12</sup> that He would volunteer Himself as Mediator and Redeemer, that He especially in the fullness of time wanted to take into Himself human nature and within it make payment for us men.<sup>13</sup>

Astonishing. Just as God deliberated over man in the beginning to create him and, thereby, through this deliberation created man in His Image, i.e., to make man the only earthly creature to know personally the True God, the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, One God in Three Persons, so now God again deliberates and takes counsel to restore the Image of God in fallen man through Christ's Passion to save and give life eternal. Jesus prays in His High Priestly prayer on the Eve of His Passion:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.<sup>14</sup>

Isaiah then calls this Child born in Bethlehem "the Mighty God". Christ is the Mighty God in the flesh to bear our burdens and be our Savior. Only God is big enough to pay our debt to God because of our sins. Hence, Christ is God in the flesh to press His Almighty Power into the Service of fallen men to save from sin. The Apostle St. Matthew writes:

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<sup>11</sup>**St. Luke 2:13-14.**

<sup>12</sup>Here Dr. Gerhard follows the form of the Scriptural expressions found in the Creed. The Creed especially ascribes to the Son redemption while, at the same time, not excluding the Father and the Spirit from our redemption because they are also the True God and, therefore, intimately involved in man's redemption in Christ.

<sup>13</sup>The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard, *Seven Christmas Sermons (1613)*, tr. Elemer M. Hohle, ed. David O. Berger, Decatur, IL: The Johann Gerhard Institute, first edition, November 1996, pp. 75, 76.

<sup>14</sup>**St. John 17:3.**

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. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.<sup>15</sup>

Likewise, the Apostle St. John teaches us that the Child in the manger in Bethlehem is the Almighty Creator in the flesh pressing His Almighty Power not into the destruction of sinners but into their Service and Salvation:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. ... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.<sup>16</sup>

Isaiah follows with the Name “the Everlasting Father”. Here Isaiah identifies Christ not according to His Person – He’s the Eternal Son of God not the Father – but rather according to His Office (Work) to father men into life eternal by His Passion. The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes:

... He is called Father on account of the new birth, since we are born anew by the power of the Holy Spirit. Psalm 110:3: **Your children are born like the dew from the morning dawn.** Gal. 6:15: **For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor foreskins means anything, rather a new creation.** This is also a great comfort, that’s why we also become His children through faith.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, Isaiah calls the Babe in Bethlehem the Prince of Peace because His Reign is the Gracious Rule of Forgiveness, giving Divine and Heavenly Peace on earth through Absolution of all sin. The Apostle St. John writes:

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<sup>15</sup>**St. Matthew 1:20-23.**

<sup>16</sup>**St. John 1:1-3, 14.**

<sup>17</sup>The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard, *Seven Christmas Sermons (1613)*, tr. Elmer M. Hohle, ed. David O. Berger, Decatur, IL: The Johann Gerhard Institute, first edition, November 1996, pp. 78, 79.

Then said Jesus to them again, Peace *be* unto you: as *my* Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on *them*, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; *and* whose soever *sins* ye retain, they are retained.<sup>18</sup>

So the angels identified Him as the Prince of Peace on the Night of His Birth:

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest on earth peace, good will toward men.<sup>19</sup>

Luther writes of Christ's Blessed Reign through the Peace of Absolution:

*And he shall teach peace to the Gentiles.* It is for this reason that He will need neither chariot, nor bow, nor battle. For He will be a "Prince of Peace," as Is. 9:6 also says; and this peace is to be not only among the Jews ... but also among the Gentiles. Therefore His rule will consist in the Word or in speech, because He says here that He will speak, or teach, peace to the Gentiles.<sup>20</sup>

## **II. Christ Gives the Gift of Salvation and Life Eternal through His Gift of Holy Baptism Fashioned by His Passion.**

### **A. Christ fashions Holy Baptism by His Passion to save from sin.**

Christ gives to us the Gift of Salvation through His Gift of Holy Baptism fashioned by His Passion. 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.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>**St. John 20:21-23.**

<sup>19</sup>**St. Luke 2:9-14.**

<sup>20</sup>*Luther's Works*, Vol. 20, p. 288.

<sup>21</sup>**Ephesians 5:25, 26-27.**



In other words, Christ fashioned Holy Baptism by His Passion because He gave Himself on the Cross so that He could sanctify us and save us through the Blessed Waters of Holy Baptism. 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 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.*<sup>22</sup>

Because Holy Baptism gives to us the Fruits of Christ's Passion, it saves from sin. The Apostle St. Peter writes:

The like figure whereunto *even* baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ ...<sup>23</sup>

#### **B. Christ gives the Gift of Life Eternal through His Gift of Holy Baptism.**

*We can see that Holy Baptism is a Precious, Priceless Gift because it was purchased with the Blood of the Son of God.* But it is also a Priceless Gift because it saves, as we've seen, and also gives to us life eternal and the resurrection of the body on the Last Day. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

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.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>*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.

<sup>23</sup>**I Peter 3:21.**

<sup>24</sup>**Titus 3:4-7.**

## **Conclusion**

God was born of the Virgin St. Mary in order to save and give men life eternal. This Blessed Work He accomplished by living the perfect life for all men and bearing their burden of the guilt of their sin. Through this Work Christ saves and fathers all men into life eternal.

This Gift of Salvation and Life Eternal Christ gives to men through the Gift of Holy Baptism, which Gift He fashioned carefully for us by His Passion. Through Holy Baptism we gain the Great Gifts of the forgiveness of sins, saving faith, salvation, life eternal, and the resurrection of the body on the Last Day.

*Amen.*