

12.24.2022 Christmas Eve

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-120

“To you is born a Savior”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*“I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”* Tonight, with Christian churches around the world, we hear again the good news that Jesus Christ is alive in this world. These are not simply ancient words written over two millennia ago. The announcement of the birth of a Savior, Jesus Christ, is good news for each of us every moment. Jesus Christ will live in you, giving direction to all you do over your entire lifetime.

The angels announced Jesus’ birth saying, *“For unto you is born this day...a Savior.”* This day means today and this moment. Christmas is an infinite moment of love in which the message of the living Christ comes anew to an anxious world. The one whose birth we celebrate tonight died for your sins, was raised from the dead, and now lives for all people. This is good news of God’s peace and good will toward our world in need.

His birth, so long ago, lives on and grows in any heart open to him. Tonight, Jesus Christ knocks again on the door of your heart. Let him in. He is the difference between life and death in this world. His birth is the birth of hope, life and peace with God and with one another.

The beauty and glory of tonight’s service is brief, and this season lasts only twelve days. The good news of a Savior who lives for you, however, will give life and hope over your entire lifetime. After the decorations are taken down and stored until next year, Jesus the Savior, will continue with you each day. He is Immanuel – God with us. *“For unto you is born...a Savior.”* These words invite us to ask ourselves: “How will I respond to this news of a Savior born for me?”

Christmas is a celebration of what God is doing in our humanity through Jesus today and every day. I think this is why God chose to enter into human life as a small, powerless and vulnerable baby. In this baby, we see how we also might grow into people, always seeking to live with peace and good will for others. At Christmas, we see what God begins in our humanity at the manger. Jesus grew as you and I, in order to show us that our humanity is capable of carrying the infinite things of God. He will dwell in you infinitely over your entire life. His life, the gospel story, shows us the greatness of God’s infinite love for humanity. Jesus’ birth is also your birth as a person of faith.

Some might say, “Jesus was born so long ago, what possible meaning could he have today?” Jesus was born into a world that, though different from ours, is also a world we can easily understand. Jesus was born into a world that understood imperial power, war, occupied land, greed and cruelty. Luke’s gospel reads, “*There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.*” Joseph and Mary of the house of David – and all the people of Israel – were subject to Rome, to an occupying nation and its imperial power. The world has not changed very much; nations wage war against one another, and greed drives human beings to cruel acts against one another. Yet into our world, Jesus Christ continues to bring true peace, forgiveness, freedom and hope for all people.

Joseph and Mary, were neither wealthy nor well-known. They knew no one in Bethlehem, and there was no room for them in the inn. Their story is also about the God who is born unknown in a stable. Christmas tells us something about God. In Jesus, God enters this world quietly as stranger born in poverty. His birth into our humanity is an affirmation of God’s will that human beings carry the divine image. Born to a seemingly insignificant young couple, Jesus grew as you and I, in order that our humanity might carry the infinite things of God. The infinite things of God exceed earthly riches and authority, giving life to our human spirit and freeing us to see our neighbor in need. We are meant to respond to our neighbor with faith active in love.

One Christmas, over 500 years ago, Martin Luther said it this way,

The Gospel does not merely teach about the history of Christ. No, it enables all who believe, to receive it as their own...Of what benefit would it be to me if Christ had been born a thousand times...if I were never to hear that he was born for me and to be my very own?

The angels’ message to the shepherds is also a message to us, “*For unto you is born a Savior.*” The birth of Jesus is announced with the words, “*for you,*” because Jesus Christ lives *for you*.

If we allow Jesus to reign in our hearts over our entire lives, we become the living body of Christ, and Christ will live in all we do for the peace and good will of God in this world. In that Christmas sermon, Luther went on to say,

Of what benefit is it to your neighbor if you build a church entirely out of gold? ...Of what benefit to your neighbor are the glitter and ceremonies of the church, the clergy’s robes, and the sanctuary? ...God has commanded none of these, but only that if you see your neighbor...in sin or in suffering in body and soul, you are to leave everything else and at once help your neighbor in every way within your power, and if you can do no more, help

your neighbor with words of comfort and prayer. Thus, Christ has done for you, giving you an example to follow.

*“Born for you”* means Jesus was born for you and for your neighbor. He was born to people oppressed in a distant land; he was born as a stranger, and there was no room for him in the inn. Yet, he grew into our humanity to live for the weakest, the sick, the stranger and the imprisoned. He was crucified outside the gate and raised so that no one would ever again die truly alone again.

Tonight, we celebrate a birth. Not simply the birth of a babe, but the birth of a Savior who lives *for you* each day. He lives for you so that you might live *for others* each day. At its core, Christianity is not a theology or a creed; nor is it a magnificent church building. Christianity is a living Savior who loves you, forgives you, and sends you out into this world to serve your neighbor.

This is the gift of Christmas – *“To you is born a Savior.”*

He will grow in you, lead and help you, so that you might embody his grace and peace in this world.

A blessed Christmas to you all. Amen.