

24 December 2011
Christmas Eve

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“A Saviour Is Born”

Text: Luke 2:1-20; Isaiah 9:2-7

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour . . .

When children are born, parents often wonder what they will grow up to be. Perhaps this new life, now swaddled warm and cozy in a blanket, will do great things. Perhaps she will be a doctor or a lawyer, or a teacher or a mother. Perhaps he will be a scientist or a leader or a father. How will God use this new life as His blessing?

But tonight we heard that for the child ***wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger***, there is no wondering. From the day He was born, from the day He was conceived, there was never any question what Jesus would be and do: He has come to be our Saviour. Our Saviour from sin, from death, and from the power of the devil. He has come to be our light in the darkness, our peace in the midst of trouble, our King who will not demand *from* us but give *to* us - for He will give for all people His very self, laying down His life on the cross, to enter death with us, so that in His resurrection our sins be forgiven and the bonds of the grave be broken.

For tonight, not just is ***a child born, but a son is given***. The eternal Son of God is born a man. The One who is Mercy has descended to sinners. The One who is Truth has come to us who have gone astray. The One who is Life has come to us who live in fear of death. To be our Saviour. To put to an end the division between God and men caused by sin; to reconcile us to the Father and so be our peace.

And so the angel announced - not just to the shepherds - but to you this night: ***Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy!*** Tonight a Saviour is born, and in Him there is again ***on earth peace, good will toward men***.

Fear not. How wonderful to hear those words! For what have you done this year that should trouble you and cause you fear? How have you hurt others and let them down? How many have you neglected to help? How many went wanting because you didn't want to be bothered? How did your greed cause others loss, your anger cause others bitterness, your words cause others pain? How often did your faith falter, did you forget to pray, did you neglect your Lord's Word and His Divine Service? How often did you doubt God's love and care and faithfulness? When your Father in heaven created you and held you in His arms, is this what He had in mind

for you?

And yet His message to you tonight, through the angels, is not a message of judgment and condemnation, but a message of peace. **Fear not!** Yes, your sin is great, even greater than you know; but this child is your Saviour. He has come for you. To shed His blood to atone for your sin *and forgive you*. To heal the wounds inflicted by those who have sinned against you, and give you peace and joy. Now, your life need not be the same. This child has come to make you new. To live in Him. To live in love.

For tonight, see not just the birth of a child that took place in the little town of Bethlehem a long, long time ago - but see your own new birth. Your own new life. For when you were baptized into Christ Jesus, you were born again, born from above, born through the water and Word and promise of God, the old you put to death, that a new child be born. A child of God. A new life filled with possibilities - not to sin, but to love. Because of the birth of Jesus, nothing would ever be the same again. And you will never be the same again.

And so repent. For that's what the new do. And tonight, think of repentance not as a burdensome thing, but as a *turning to the manger*. Turn away from yourself and to the manger. Turn away from your sin and to the manger. Turn away from all that old stuff that is still clinging to you and dragging you down, to the manger. And see there a picture of who you now are in Him: a child of God. And then hear the angels of God rejoicing and singing over you! For they do, you know. Rejoice over every sinner who repents (Luke 15:10); over every new birth in Christ.

And know this too - that if the angels are rejoicing, then so is your Father in heaven rejoicing over you. For they wouldn't if He didn't. But as earthly fathers delight in the child they hold in their arms, so your heavenly Father delights in you. It doesn't seem possible, does it? Knowing ourselves, knowing our sin, knowing how much we do not deserve His love. But it's true. As John said, the Son in the manger proves it.

So tonight we celebrate not just the birthday of Jesus. Tonight is much, much more than that. ***For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour . . .*** That it may be to us as we sang earlier:

*O holy child of Bethlehem, Descend to us we pray.
Cast out our sin and enter in Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels Their great glad tidings tell.
O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord, Emmanuel* (LSB #361 v. 4).

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.