

Christmas Eve 7pm From Beginning to End Dec 21 2021

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen!

We've heard it once again. A thumbnail sketch of the Christmas message. And if there's one time of the year we wouldn't want to miss the forest for the trees, it's Christmas! Around the world, churches are full and ears open. The traditional "trees" of Christmas surround us: beautiful music, carol upon carol; all the sights of Christmas trees, lights, Santas and manger scenes; the sounds of bells and music; and the smells of cookies, cakes, gingerbread and Christmas dinner that we've come to love.

Against this backdrop, once again tonight, God's Word invites us to step back and see the forest as well as the trees—to hear once again some of the key passages of Scripture that take us from deep in the history of God's people to the birth of the Savior.

We heard from the Old Testament that the Savior would come from among the descendants of Jacob, also called Israel. We heard from the prophet Isaiah the who, when, and where of the Savior, especially that He would be a Son from the house of King David, and be both Mighty God and Prince of Peace. We heard from our hymns that He would be born of Jesse's lineage and of a virgin's birth.

Then we heard from the New Testament of the fulfillment of those ancient promises that the Savior—the very Son of God, the actual Word of God, who is eternal with God, who Himself is God—was born into the world in Bethlehem, in the days of Caesar Augustus, to a virgin named Mary, so that He could give His life in exchange for our life, as payment for our sin, our sin which has disqualified us—both here and forever—from the blessed life our Creator intended for us.

Such is the biblical narrative of Christmas, as we have heard it again tonight. And it's really very simple. Christmas is about God's gift to you—the concrete, flesh-and-blood, real-life gift of his own Son.

God's own Son, born into this world as Jesus of Nazareth so that He could walk in our shoes, and live in our skin, and experience what we experience.

And, because He is God, He could then redeem fallen humanity—redeem us!—from the curse of sin, death, and everlasting condemnation.

Christmas is about God's gift of hope for beyond this life. Hope for you and me! Hope for a never-ending, perfectly blissful existence with Him, just as he intended it from the beginning for humanity, the pinnacle of his creation.

No matter how far you've wandered, no matter how buried the Gospel message has become under the other priorities in your life and the chaos of this life. No matter how bittersweet tonight's celebration might be for you because of sad memories or sorrows or the many afflictions and trials, losses or tragedies you've experienced this year, God's simple good news of the Gospel remains for you tonight.

That news is that a Savior has been born for you! That His name is Christ the Lord. And that He took all that baggage and guilt of your life onto Himself and paid for it at the cross where He died for your sins. And in exchange, He gives you His holiness and innocence, His righteousness. He adopts us as sons and daughters, and gives His promise that you and I will follow after Him in His resurrection from the grave and ascension into heaven.

And this gift of hope doesn't depend in any way on your earning it. It's God's pure and free gift for you and for all people, just for the believing—promised of old, given in Bethlehem, paid for on the cross, and unwrapped for you tonight.

This gift was first given in Bethlehem, but God didn't stop giving His gifts there or back then, ages ago. And His giving to you doesn't end with us here tonight. It is not a limited time offer. It has no small print, no purchase necessary, no coupons to cut, no credit card needed.

Rather, everything we've heard this evening—and so much more, together with all the life-changing reality it brings—is available to you constantly in the fellowship of the Holy Christian Church: love, forgiveness, grace, mercy, peace, hope, acceptance, redemption, and salvation. We don't have to wait for these gifts. They come to us now, in the re-birth by the Holy Spirit.

You are released from all guilt and shame through the forgiveness of sin received in Confession and Absolution and in Holy Communion. It's all God's gift to you, for the sake of Christ Jesus, every time you hear and receive God's Word in faith and join in the communion of the saints.

So, this is why we began tonight with “O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant. O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem. O come and behold Him, born the King of Angels. O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!

This is why we end with Joy to the World, crowning this Silent and Holy Night! Not only because a Savior *was* born, but because the Savior *is* born—born into your heart again tonight by his Gospel, born into your heart for your salvation. And the gifts that your Savior brings, He will keep offering to you in the communion of this, the Ark of God’s Church—in this very place—until He comes again.

YOU SEE, A SAVIOR WAS BORN, AND THE SAVIOR IS BORN. This is how God loves you from beginning to end! Amen.

May the love of God and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesu Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide in you to life everlasting. Amen!