

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Christmas Day, December 25, 2017

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 102, 79, 85: 1-5, (Sermon: 6-8, 9-11, 12, 13-15.) 94, 92.
Lessons: Isaiah 7: 10-14, Titus 2: 11-14, Luke 2: 1-20.
Sermon Text: Luke 2:11.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

(Based on Christmas Sermons of Martin Luther)

In the name of Jesus Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

Place yourself on the fields outside Bethlehem with the shepherds. Put out of your minds all the things that have happened to you and in our world in the past few days. Look at the heavens. Listen to the message of the angels: *“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.”* Let us today look at

THE FAITH OF THE CHILD OF GOD AT CHRISTMAS

- 1. The Virgin Mother bore a son – a true man**
- 2. That son is my Lord and Savior**

How many really believe this story? Many hear this story at Christmas-time but not all believe it really happened. Even in Luther’s day in the monasteries, seminaries and universities there were lectures about the idea that Christ the Lord, born of Mary, is true man and God. But it went no further than saying and hearing.

If people today had as much from Christ and the teaching of the gospel as from the devil, they would think much more highly of Christ. It is a most important matter of faith to believe that this infant, born of Mary, is true God; for nobody’s reason could accept the fact that he who created heaven and earth and is adored by the angels was born of a virgin. That is the point of the Christmas Gospel. This child is the Lord and Savior.

HYMN 85: 6-8.

But for whom was he born and whose Lord and Savior is he? The angels declare that he was born Lord and Savior. Hearing the words and believing them are not the same thing. Who could ever grasp the full meaning of these words: *“a Savior, who is Christ the Lord,”* and, *“to you”*?

If these words are only in my thoughts, in my mind, in my intellect, then they have no firm roots. We can hear the words proclaimed by the angel, but firm faith does not always follow. For reason does not understand both sides of this faith, first that Christ is a man, and secondly that he is also the Savior and Lord and King. This knowledge must be revealed from heaven. One must believe that the virgin mother bore a son, a true man, and believe that the son of Mary is my Lord and Savior.

First, let’s ask to whom this joyful news is to be proclaimed. Those who are faint-hearted and feel the burden of their sins, like the shepherds, to whom the angels first proclaim the message. Beyond the first point of faith there must be the second point of faith, namely that Christ is not only the virgin’s Son, but also the Lord of angels and the Savior of men. The words anyone can understand, even pagans, but for unbelievers they do not proceed from the heart. For unbelievers they go no farther than hearing. This is not faith, however, but only a memory of what has been heard. There is a difference between knowing something and believing that thing.

This is our theology, which we preach in order that we may understand and believe what the angel tells us. Mary bore the child and nursed it, and the Father in heaven has his Son, lying in the manger and the mother's lap. Why did God do all this? Why does Mary guard the child as a mother should? Reason answers: so that we may make an idol of her, that honor may be paid to the mother. Mary becomes all this without her knowledge and consent, and songs and glory and honor are addressed to the mother.

Yet the Word of God in front of us does not praise the honor of the mother. The angel says, ***"I bring you good tidings of great joy."*** I am to accept the child and his birth and not concentrate on the mother, as far as this is possible, although her part cannot be forgotten, for where there is a birth there must also be a mother. Nevertheless, we dare not put our faith in the mother but only in the fact that the child was born. And the angel desired that we should see nothing but the child which is born, just as the angels themselves, as though they were blind, saw nothing but the child born of the virgin, and desired that all created things should be as nothing compared with this child.

For nothing in the world could even for one moment save me from my sins or from the peril of death. In my sin, my death, I must take leave of all created things. The sun, the moon, stars, all creatures, physicians, emperors, kings, wise men, science, technology or any works of men or of angels cannot help me. When I die I shall first see nothing but black darkness, and yet that light, ***"unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord"*** remains in my eyes and in my heart and fills all heaven and earth. The Savior will help me when all people and things of this earth have forsaken me. I see nothing in heaven and earth but this child. So great should that light be which declares that he is my Savior that I can say: Mary, you did not bear this child for yourself alone. The child is not yours alone; you did not bring him forth for yourself, but for me, even though you are his mother.

He is my Savior, too. And for us the time must come when suddenly all will be darkness and we shall know nothing but this message of the angel: ***"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."***

HYMN 85: 9-11.

This, then, is the faith we preach, of which all unbelievers know nothing. Even some who are Christian in name only receive the Word of God only as a piece of paper. That message from the Word must go to the heart. Unbelievers receive this greatest of treasures to their great harm and still think they are Christians, as if the paper were to say: because I certainly have or have heard the written words, "to you is born this day the Savior"; therefore I shall be saved.

This is the chief article of faith, which separates us from all the heathen, that you, O man, may not only learn that Christ, born of the virgin, is the Lord and Savior, but also believe the fact that he is your Lord and Savior, that you may be able to boast in your heart: I hear the Word that sounds from heaven and says: This child who is born of the virgin is not only his mother's son. He is more mine than Mary's, for he was born for me, for the angel said, ***"To you"*** is born the Savior. Then ought you to say, "I thank thee, dear Lord."

HYMN85: 12

Reason may say "who knows? I believe that Christ, born of the virgin, is the Lord and Savior of the apostles, but was he born for me, a sinner? You must believe that he was born for you. He was not born merely in order that I should honor the mother, that she should be praised because he was born of the virgin mother. That honor belongs only to her and it is not to be despised, for the angel said, ***"blessed are you among women!"*** Luke 1:28 (NKJV) But it must not be too highly esteemed lest one deny what is written here: ***"To you is born this day the Savior."*** He was not merely concerned to be born of a virgin; it was infinitely more than that. It was this, as Mary herself sings in the Magnificat: ***"He has helped his servant Israel"*** Luke 1:54 (NIV) not that he was born of me and my virginity, but he was born for you and for your benefit, not only for my honor.

Take hold of yourself, examine yourself and see whether you are a Christian! If you can sing: The Son, who is proclaimed to be a Lord and Savior, is my Savior; and if you can confirm the message of the angel and say yes to it and believe it in your heart, then your heart will be filled with assurance and joy and confidence.

I want to believe in this child as my Savior. This I want more than any gift I could possibly receive. We must be convinced as the psalmist says, *“there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.”* Psalm 73:25 (KJV)

You see how a person rejoices when he receives Christmas presents. But how many are there who shout and jump for joy when they hear the message of the angel: “To you is born this day the Savior”? Indeed, many look upon it as just a sermon that must be preached, and when they have heard it, they go away just as they were before. This would show that we do not have faith.

We do not believe that the virgin mother bore a son and that he is the Lord and Savior unless, added to this, we believe the second thing, namely, that he is my Savior and Lord. When I can say: This I accept as my own, because the angel meant it for me, and if I believe it in my heart, I shall not fail to love the mother Mary, and even more love the child, and especially the Father. For if it is true that the child was born of the virgin and is mine, then I have no angry God and I must know and feel that there is nothing but joy in the heart of the Father and no sadness in my heart. For, if what the angel says is true, that he is our Lord and Savior, what can sin do against us? *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* Romans 8:31 (NIV) Greater words than these I cannot speak, nor can the angels and even the Holy Spirit, as is sufficiently testified by the beautiful and devout songs that have been made about it. I do not trust myself to express it. I most gladly hear you sing and speak of it, but as long as no joy is there, so long is faith still weak or even non-existent, and you still do not believe the angel.

Many have chosen other saviors. We could look only at men’s invented works by which we are supposedly to be saved. This is as much as to say, I do not believe in the Savior and Lord whom Mary bore; and yet many sing the words of the angel, play their organs, and go the huge full-church services and even secular gatherings which sing Christmas music. They speak the words with their tongues but their heart has another savior.

It has been said sufficiently that this Savior lies in the manger. But if there is any other thing that I think saves me, then I rightly call it my Savior. If the sun, moon, and stars save, I can call them saviors. If any of the many who have been named “saints” by the Roman Catholic Church – or by anyone else – save, then they surely are my savior. If any thing saves, then it is my savior. But then what is left of the honor of the child who was born this day, whom the angel calls Lord and Savior, and who wants to keep his name, which is “Savior” and “Christ the Lord”. If I set up any savior except this child, no matter who or what it is or is called, then Jesus Christ is not the Savior. But the Word of God says that he is the Savior. And if this is true – and this is the truth – then let everything else go.

One who hears the message of the angel and believes it will be filled with the fear, love, and trust in God, like the shepherds. True, it is too high for me to believe that I should come into this treasure without any merit on my part. And yet, so it must be. Luther tells us that in the papacy this message was not preached in the pulpit, and I am afraid that it will disappear again. It was another message that the devil initiated and has allowed to remain in the papacy. How many Christmas songs have no mention of the Savior? Among unbelievers the devil has completely wiped out the message of the Savior. Therefore, we must remember it, sing it, and learn it, while there is still time! I fear that the time will come when we shall not be allowed to hear, believe, and sing this message in public, and the time has already come when it is no longer understood; though Satan does allow it to be spoken with the mouth. But when it comes to declaring that he is born for you, and to singing about this holy child, the Son of God, let us invite him, by the working of the Holy Ghost, into our hearts even now by singing ...

HYMN 85, stanzas 13-15.

What we have said has been about simply believing that the Virgin Mary bore a son, and that that son is my Lord and Savior. It is about accepting and believing this and giving thanks to God, who so loved you that he gave you a Savior who is yours. And for a sign he sent the angel from heaven to proclaim him, in order that nothing else should be preached except that this child is the Savior and far better than heaven and earth. Therefore, we should acknowledge and accept him, confess him as our Savior, call upon him in every need, and never doubt that he will save us from all our sins. Amen.