

The Nativity of Our Lord, Christmas Midnight, A ✕ D 2009

Luke 2:1-20

In the Name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

1 Merry Christmas, Mary. While they were there, that is, while they were in Bethlehem, literally, the House of Bread, the city of David, the city of Joseph's ancestors, the time came, not once upon a time or some time, but while Quirinius was governor of Syria, in the forty-second year of the reign of Caesar Augustus, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn Son and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. The same night, while shepherds outside Bethlehem were tending their sheep, the skies rang with the sound of an angelic voice. "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." Then the skies lit up with a multitude of voices, and their song pealed from the heavens: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!" So the shepherds left their flocks in the field and ran to find Mary and Joseph and the newborn Messiah. Finding them, they made known what the angels had revealed to them.

2 Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. The infant, all wrinkled and red, wiped clean and suckling at her breast, is God. God has human flesh. For nine months He has grown in the Virgin's womb. God was everything you were: an embryo, a blastocyst, a zygote, a fetus. God was once an embryo, at whose *in utero* presence, John the Baptist leapt for joy and his mother Elizabeth called Him Lord. For nine months, God has had human flesh, but not like some half-and-half mutant; no, He is fully God and completely human. In fact, not since Adam and Eve has there been anyone this human. Sin has corrupted humanity, left all of Adam's descendants broken by sin, less than fully human.

3 But not this Baby. The Son of Mary is the Son of God. God has taken human flesh. Do not be so naïve as to think you can ascend to God, that you can approach heaven by force or by

works, that you can appease God with anything of your own. God is not that easy. In fact, He's impossible; His standard is perfection. If you want to ascend to Him, you must be as He is. No, you cannot ascend to God, but He descended to His creation.

4 For nine months, Mary has endured scorn. The sideways glances from the people of Nazareth make no attempt to veil the fact that they find the virgin conception story not even a little believable. For thirty years, she will be the mother of the born-out-of-wedlock Jesus. She is a virgin and will eventually be a widow, as well, the worst of both worlds. And a sword will pierce her own soul, as well. Nothing will sting—not the loneliness of virginity, nor the heartbrokenness of widowhood, not even the derision of her disbelieving neighbors—more than this. Her Son was born to die. She will watch as He is arrested on false charges, propped up in some kangaroo court where the mob rules, unjustly sentenced to death, nailed to a cross. She will stand at the foot of the cross as her Son hangs dying. “Woman, behold your Son.”

5 Merry Christmas, Mary. The Child whose delicately soft skin you kiss will be betrayed with a kiss. The Baby to whom your body has given life will be the only source of life for the world. The Child you lay in the feed trough, who relies on you for food and comfort will give His own flesh as food for eternal life to all who eat it. Your Son will die so that billions may be adopted as sons of God the Father. Merry Christmas, Mary.

6 Learn from Mary, beloved, what is the content of the Christian life. When the archangel Gabriel appears to Mary and announces to her that she will be the Virgin Mother of God, she responds with the words of faith, “Let it be to me according to your word.” Learn from Mary the song of faith. When she greeted her cousin Elizabeth, she sang, “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior...for His mercy is on those who fear Him.” This is not the song of a doting mother but of a receptive Christian, who has received mercy and forgiveness. When the shepherds revealed to her all that the angels had declared about her Son, she treasured these things in her heart. When Simeon declared that her Son was appointed for the rising and fall of many in Israel, for the salvation of all Israel, she treasured up these things in her heart. And learn from Mary the substance of the Christian's calling. When they ran out of wine at the wedding where Jesus, His mother, and His disciples were guests, she told the servants, “Do whatever He tells you.” So Mary, the ever-virgin, the widow, the mother whose Son is unjustly put to death,

becomes the image of the Church, whose children are innumerable, whose Husband is the imperishable Christ.

7 Learn from Mary, willing to endure shame and humiliation, so that God might be born with human flesh, to bear the scorn from those outside the Church. Learn from Mary, willing to bear scorn and derision, in order that the Savior might come to mankind, that disciples of Jesus can expect persecution from the world. Learn from Mary to treasure up the things of God in your heart. To receive faith. Learn from Mary the content of faith. Faith receives, says “yes” to the gifts the Lord wants to deliver. Learn from Mary what Christmas is all about.

8 You cannot have Jesus any way you wish. He comes in a very particular way. He comes as a human baby. He comes to die. He comes because you are completely unable to come to God. He comes, not to exhort you to righteousness, but to deliver righteousness. He comes in very particular means. Repent of supposing you might have God on your own terms. Repent of thinking you can sometimes say “yes” to God’s gifts and other times tell Him “no.” Repent of thinking your sins are so small that they do not require any big Savior. Repent of trying to come to God with your own designs. The Baby born is the Savior, but He will only save you on His terms, not your own.

9 Christmas, the feast of Christ’s Nativity, is not separated from Good Friday. Every manger in every Nativity scene has a baby in the manger. Jesus did not remain a baby, but He was a baby. He was a baby born to save you from your sin. You cannot have Christmas without Christ, nor a manger without a Baby, nor a cross without a Body. Bare crosses are not a sign of Christ’s resurrection. He didn’t rise from the cross. The cross was bare while Jesus was still dead. Empty crosses are simply stylized crucifixes. The cross is the instrument of the death of God, as the manger was the place where His infant Body was laid. They are inseparable: the manger and the cross. The Baby Jesus is born to die, born to save you from your sin through His death.

10 The Baby born to Mary is your Savior. He was born to die, born to bear your sin—all of it, not just part of it—and pay for it. And now He comes to you on His terms. In Holy Baptism, He makes you His brothers and sisters, children of God, co-heirs of eternal life. In Holy Absolution, He declares you to be a saint and Himself the sinner. In His Holy Supper, He

delivers to you His true Body and Blood. This is the true gift of Christmas. All other gifts pale in comparison. Here, at the Lord's Altar, you receive the very Body and Blood of the Baby born to live, die, and rise for you; you receive the very forgiveness of sins. If you want Jesus, you'll have to have him on His terms. If you want Christmas, you have to have the Christ with it. What else could you want? Merry Christmas.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Jeff Hemmer

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