

The Nativity of Our Lord, Christmas Midnight, A✠D 2010

Luke 2:1-14

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 Merry Christmas. So what? What good does that do you? When December 26 comes around, what will be different? You'll probably have some more stuff, some bigger bills, some returns to make. But when December 26 rolls around on the Church's calendar, she will mark the feast of St. Stephen, weirdly placed on the Second Day of Christmas every year. You know Stephen, right? He was the very first Christian martyr, the very first believer in this infant Savior to die for his faith, to die for confessing that this Baby, whose birth we nostalgically, even wistfully, celebrate tonight, is no mere baby.

2 So what? Another year, another Christmas, but what good does it do you? Is it just some kind of milquetoast sentimentality that brings people to church on a Friday evening, at 11 p.m. every year? People worry and fret to keep Christ in Christmas. Preachers tonight will rail against the secularization of Christmas. But if a secular Christmas means that even in the most ordinary places, even in shopping malls, over elevator speakers, and on easy-listening radio stations, this powerful profundity is proclaimed: Christ the Savior is born. If a commercialization of a Christian holy day means that even the pagans can hum along "God and sinners reconciled," if an incessant quest for gifts and goodies means that the poignant theology of Christmas carols crackles all around you, so be it. Christ is not any less in Christmas than in any other Holy Day, no matter how many people are celebrating, whether piously or nostalgically. And what preacher is so naïve about the secularization of Christmas that he doesn't rejoice over all the people who return to hear the Word of God at least once or twice a year. If the pagan culture wants to commercialize Ascension, if it draws people to hear the Word of God on a Thursday forty days after Easter, that would be ok with me.

3 So, Merry Christmas, but so what? People across the world love to celebrate Christmas because there is an innate desire inside all people to be close to God. Religions of all sorts contain a story of the god coming to dwell with mankind. Why is that story such an intrinsic part of human desire? Even irreligious people celebrate Christmas. Even pagans consider themselves "spiritual." Why? Because, no matter how many generations pass since Adam and Eve, mankind will never outgrow the desire to dwell with God.

4 But you can't. You simply can't. Sinners cannot dwell in the presence of a Holy God. All descendants of Adam and Eve have in common not only their indwelling desire to be with God but also their complete inability to make that happen. Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect, commands the Law, almost seemingly mockingly. Want to dwell with a perfect God. Simple. Be perfect. And yet, not only are you born with the corruption of human nature inherited from your first parents Adam and Eve, but you sin daily and hourly. Not only do your outward sins alienate you from God, but even the sins in your heart, your angry, lustful, selfish, blasphemous, covetous, greedy thoughts. How can you think that a Holy God, a God whose knowledge extends even to those thoughts and feelings inside you, would be pleased to dwell with you?

5 So, Merry Christmas. Here is your reason for hope. Ponder this: God became man. And yet He did not cease to be God. He was no less God after His incarnation than before. And in His incarnation, He is no less human than you. More even. The Second Person of the Eternal Trinity inseparably joined Himself to human flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin. He took flesh. His enfleshment, His incarnation, His taking human flesh is good news for you. God became man, perfect man, unstained by sin, uncorrupted as you are, unspoiled by original or actual sin. At the birth of the Son of God and the Son of Mary, the angels rejoiced, singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill to

men.” God descended to you. This is unlike the myths of other gods coming to mankind in that this is verifiably true. This is myth become truth, the long hoped-for Messiah to save His people.

6 What will be different tomorrow? Today you have a God who dwelled with His creation. God could have left you, could have let the broken world go its own way to hell. But He didn’t. He was born. Descended to man to elevate men to God. Instead of leaving you alone, apart from your Creator, the Eternal Word came to His creation. And His Virgin Mother wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and placed Him in a manger. Jesus was born for you. He was born, took human flesh, to deal with humanity’s sinfulness, to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, who takes away your sin. God was born to die in the place of sinners. He didn’t come to His creation merely to be a companion or a brother, a cheerleader, a coach, or an example. He was born to be your Savior. To die on the cross for you. Christmas—the Incarnation of the Son of God—is every day for you.

7 Christmas is in Bethlehem: the city named the House of Bread. And having been born, the Savior of the world is wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger, a feed trough. What will be different tomorrow? You will have dwelled with God. He deigns to dwell in you, in your mouth, feeding you with Himself. When all the gifts expire, fail to satisfy, when the time comes for cleaning up, for driving home, for returning to work, what will have changed? You will have received God at this, the House of Bread, the New Bethlehem, his holy altar, the Lord’s Supper. Come to the feed trough, the new manger, the Lord’s altar. Eat the Body of Him who was born to give you the new birth of water and the Spirit in Holy Baptism. Drink the Blood of Him who took human flesh and blood in order to shed His blood to buy your release from sin, death, and the devil. What will be different tomorrow is that today you receive Jesus. So Merry Christmas, indeed!

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

Pastor Jeff Hemmer