



Christ Lutheran Church

605 South Fifth Street • Norfolk, NE 68701

Share God's Word, share His love, and do it now!

Pastor Chip Winter, Director of Ministries

“From Heaven Above to Earth I Come: Two.” – Luke 2:17

3rd Sunday of Easter – April 30, 2017

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Grace to you and Peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. The text for our sermon is the Gospel appointed for the day, Luke 2:17.

My dear family in Christ, the shepherds couldn't keep it to themselves, and who could blame them? They'd been frightened to death by the warrior choir, the singing army in the sky. Then they came to find the child, just as it had been told them. So they spread what they'd been told about this child lying in a manger: this is the Savior; this is the Christ for whom the people of God had been waiting, age after age; this is the Lord.

Little could they have known what all this meant. We sang in stanza 8 of Jesus sharing our misery – and that would be plain to see in such humble surroundings as a stable. But you and I know better. We know the misery He came to bear. **“Do you have any idea, Lord, of what you chose for yourself...How will you be able to bear the contact of even a single sin, you who are wholly pure? Watch out! You will surely be deeply shocked when one of us casually brushes by you in the street. You will look into this person's soul and, in the depths of it, behold the mass of entangled worms that dwells there. You will even look back and see all the petty and cowardly malice which has accumulated there over the years. And I tell you: already you will feel a rising nausea. But it is not enough merely to graze this sinner, to bear contact with him**

for just one moment, to feel his putrid breath upon your face. You must try to take his sins into yourself, to declare yourself one with them; not only to study them from without, but to taste all their reality and malice from within. You will have to imagine that they are not the sins of this wholly alien person – sins which basically have nothing to do with you – but your very own.” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, page 1253). The misery of the manger is but a poor foreshadowing of the cross Jesus would mount decades later to forgive the sins of the world.

To accomplish this feat, God becomes incarnate, as we sang in stanza 9-11. He takes on flesh to become “God with us.” He, in this flesh, takes our sin as His own so that He might share His joy, His peace, His righteousness with us and that almighty exchange which is made possible by our faith in Him.

He faces those things – good things in God’s original creation – which our sinful nature turns into temptations and lures and transgressions. In stanza 12 it refers to “**honor, wealth and might.**” Those words could well describe the temptations Jesus faced in the wilderness: **Might** – what power would be manifested by one Who could turn stones into nourishment! No one had ever done such a thing before and He would be acclaimed a wonder-maker. **Wealth** – “bow down to me and I will give you authority over all the kingdoms of the world.” **Honor** – how beloved must one person be to be rescued by the Almighty as he plummeted from the temple parapet!

Not succumbing to any of these, Jesus is able to make the perfect sacrifice for sin. This is why He came.

This is the message that comes to us time and time again through God’s Word. Jesus comes to be with us in the body and blood shared in the sacrament of the altar. His promises are new every morning as we recall the welcome extended to us in the waters of baptism.

Advent is the season when we recollect the three ways in which Jesus' arrival is awaited. We commemorate how the world was waiting for His first arrival in the flesh, as the son of Mary, the ward of Joseph. We rejoice that Jesus continues to come to us by His Spirit through the Word and the Sacraments of baptism and holy communion. And we look forward to the day when He comes again.

Just as the shepherds could only have a dim understanding of what Jesus came to accomplish, there are many around us who have only the dimmest understanding of what Advent could mean and what Christmas truly signifies. That is why the stanza 13 and 14 are so important for us, tonight.

In 13 we confront the calling that is ours to bear Jesus Christ. We are to take Him with us in our hearts every day, everywhere. We are to bring Him to those around us so that they can grow in their understanding – to rejoice that Jesus was born in Bethlehem to be their Savior, to praise God that He comes to us each day and to await anxiously Jesus' triumphant return on the last day.

In 14 we realize that our lips can no longer keep silence. What we sing tonight and in this season we sing not only to one another and to our God, but to the world. We are the modern-day equivalent of the shepherds, declaring what has been made known to us concerning this Savior, Christ the Lord. We rejoice and sing as we await the return of our Lord and king. Amen.