

The Festival of the Holy Nativity of Our Lord  
Hebrews 1:1-12: "This Humble Child Is the Lord of the Angels."  
December 25, 2019 | Jerico Evangelical Lutheran Church

**In Nomine Iesu**

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EXORDIUM

"Christmas is all about giving." We hear that message frequently during this season. We are bombarded by TV commercials suggesting millions of gift ideas, while others encourage us to give of our time and money to help those in need. It is certainly good to give. But the *first* Christmas was about more than giving. The Son of God came in the flesh not only to **give** His blessings to us, but also to **take** certain things from us.

Some say that Jesus' purpose was to make a better life for us on earth. They say that if you put your trust in Jesus, He will take away all the bad things in your life and will give you only good things. For example, He will take away your debt and give you wealth. He will take away your enemies and give you more friends. He will take away all your problems and give you happiness. This is called "prosperity preaching," and it is not what God promises in the Bible. God does not promise to give you a perfect life on earth. He promises to take all who trust in Him to the eternal glories of heaven.

In order to accomplish this for you, He had to take away your sin. He had to take away the devil's accusations against you. He had to take away the sting of death and the eternal punishment of hell. Jesus did this by taking on the demands of God's law and meeting them perfectly for you. He did this by taking your sins on Himself and suffering for them on the cross. He did this by taking the death you deserved and rising victorious from the grave.

And what does He give to those who trust in Him? He gives His righteousness. He gives forgiveness for all sin. He gives eternal life and salvation. This is why the Christ-Child came. He came to save you from your sins (Mat. 1:21). Christmas is about much more than giving (especially *our* giving). It is about what Jesus came to **take** and **give** for our salvation. We now rise and sing our festival hymn, "Rejoice, Rejoice This Happy Morn!" (#142):

Rejoice, rejoice this happy morn!  
A Savior unto us is born,  
The Christ, the Lord of glory.  
His lowly birth in Bethlehem  
The angels from on high proclaim  
And sing redemption's story.  
My soul,  
Extol  
God's great favor;  
Bless Him ever  
For salvation.  
Give Him praise and adoration!

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Merciful God, heavenly Father, who gave Your only begotten Son to become man, that through Him we might be made partakers of all Your heavenly gifts, grant that in true faith we may comfort ourselves with Your mercy and thus obtain the blessed fruits of His holy incarnation; through the same Your dear Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 59)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for this morning is taken from the first chapter of the Book of Hebrews. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs. / For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are My Son, today I have begotten You"? Or again, "I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son"? And again, when He brings the firstborn into the world, He says, "Let all God's angels worship Him." Of the angels He says, "He makes His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire." / But of the Son He says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness beyond Your companions." And, "You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of Your hands; they will perish, but You remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe You will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will have no end." (ESV)

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, at whose name "every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:10-11), dear fellow redeemed:

The angels of God were prominent characters at the time of the first Christmas. The angel Gabriel appeared to the virgin Mary to tell her that she would conceive a Son by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luk. 1:26-38). Then an angel appeared to Joseph, her betrothed, in a dream. The angel encouraged him to take Mary as his wife, since her child was the promised Savior sent by God (Mat. 1:18-25). Then on the night of Jesus' birth, a multitude of angels appeared to shepherds in a field outside Bethlehem and praised God for His grace in sending a Savior (Luk. 2:8-14).

What a sight this must have been! Can you imagine the night sky illuminated with countless bright angels? It was a very different scene a short time later when the shepherds saw a newborn Baby "wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger" (Luk. 2:12). Comparing the two

scenes, the singing angels were far more impressive. And yet, here in the manger “asleep on the hay” was **the Lord of the Angels**.

To see was not to believe. Nothing about this Child revealed His eternal nature. He did not look like the Creator of the world. He did not look like “*the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature.*” He did not look like “*He upholds the universe by the word of His power,*” as today’s text describes Him. He just looked like a normal Baby. As He grew older, most of the people who knew Jesus would not have guessed He was the Son of God. They liked Him. He was a nice young man (Luk. 2:52). But He was Joseph and Mary’s son from Nazareth (Mat. 13:55).

This opinion about Him did not start to change until Jesus began to publicly teach and perform miracles. Even then, many might have preferred to see an angel than to spend time with Jesus. That still might be true. There are plenty who take comfort in guardian angels, but who have no desire to be visited by Jesus where He promises to be found—in His holy Word and Sacraments.

But why honor the messenger more than the Master? Why look to the servant more than the Lord? Perhaps it is because Jesus is too humble for the sinner’s liking. His entrance into the world was totally unimpressive. He didn’t look like the kind of person who would make a difference in the world or even in His community. For a while in His adult years, people believed in Him. But by the time He was condemned and nailed to a Roman cross, most had deserted Him. What good had He done?

Looks, of course, can be deceiving. Jesus, from His cradle to His grave, was much more than met the eye. Jesus is the Son of God, begotten of the Father from eternity. He was “begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father” (Nicene Creed). He was the Creator, not a creature. The evangelist John wrote that “*All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made*” (Joh. 1:3).

The angels, on the other hand, are created beings, formed during the six days of creation. These mighty beings were created to serve God, to do His will. And that’s exactly what they were doing at Christmas. They were sent by God to deliver “*good tidings of great joy,*” the news that the Savior of the nations had come. These angels were in awe at God’s plan for mankind. They marveled at His love for sinners. They rejoiced at His mercy.

Their joyful devotion to the Lord is a great example for all of us. When we read about the holy angels, we never see them drawing attention to themselves. They do not look for glory or recognition for their work. Their glory is in the Lord. Their purpose is to serve Him.

That should be our focus and purpose too, but you and I are not always that way. We like people to see the good things we do and praise us for it. This can happen when we give nice gifts, or when we go out of our way to do something special for someone. We do this out of love for them, but it is not purely out of love. We also desire to be recognized for what we gave.

We like to feel that we have done important things, that we have mattered in the world. We have often bought into the idea that the most important thing is to try to make a name for

ourselves and make our mark in some way. We adopt the world's advice to follow our dreams and do what is best for ourselves. But what does that accomplish? Our earthly gains and successes are temporary. Focusing on these things only feeds our selfish sinful nature. In these ways, we are nothing like the angels of God. They are selfless. They are completely righteous. They are perfectly obedient to the Lord. You and I are not that way.

This is why the Son of God became man. He came to save us from our selfish attitudes, our unholy passions, and our thoughts, words, and deeds of sin. But He couldn't just snap His fingers and make it all go away. There are consequences for breaking God's holy law. Sin has to be punished. So the Son of God *"made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men"* (Phi. 2:7).

Jesus came to serve. He came to offer Himself as your Substitute. This is why He came in such humility. He did not come for earthly glory. He came for your salvation. And the only way to save you was to be mistreated and wrongfully accused. It was to be mocked and tortured. It was to be pinned to a cross and left there until He died. It was to have the Father's wrath poured out against Him, instead of against us. One of our Christmas hymns points to this purpose for His coming: "Nails, spear shall pierce Him through, / The cross be borne for me, for you" (ELH 145, v. 2).

Jesus' life was not glorious as the world measures glory. But it was the most significant life ever lived. Jesus lived not for Himself, but for all people. He lived a perfect life of obedience for them. He offered up the perfect sacrifice of His body and blood for their sins. And He rose again from the dead in perfect fulfillment of His holy Word.

No angel ever did or ever could do this. Only God could. Only God could save sinners. God the Father sent His only Son to be *"born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we [sinners] might receive adoption as sons"* (Gal. 4:4-5). Oh, how the angels marveled when the Lord of heaven became a human Baby! Oh, how they wondered when *"The King of heav'nly grace, / Came down from His exalted throne / To save our fallen race"* (ELH 127, v. 2).

God wants you to join Him in heaven with all the saints and the holy angels. He wants your voice to be joined with the heavenly choir that once sang on the night of a special Baby's birth. That humble Baby was the Christ-Child, the long-promised King, the Lord of the angels, the Savior of sinners.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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