

In Nomine Iesu

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Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child,
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled,
Within my heart that it may be
A quiet chamber kept for Thee. *Amen.* (ELH #123, v. 13)

The text for the homilies on this holy evening is taken from the first chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, beginning at verse 18. We read as follows in Jesus' name:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. / But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel*" (which means, God with us). / When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called His name Jesus. ^(ESV)

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

I. "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

We have no record of Joseph and Mary's courtship beyond what is recorded by the evangelist Matthew. Some speculate that Joseph was a bit older than Mary and that he may have even been married and had children before. Whatever the case, Joseph and Mary now became betrothed to each other. This was something like our modern practice of engagement. It was a public declaration that they intended to be married. But since they were not married yet, Joseph and Mary did not live in the same house or share a bed.

So imagine Joseph's surprise when Mary told him she was pregnant! She told Joseph how she had been visited by an angel, who informed her that she would conceive a Son. She was to name Him Jesus. The Lord God would give Him the throne of David, and there would be no end to His kingdom. Mary asked the angel how this was possible since she was a virgin. And the angel said that the Holy Spirit would conceive the Child in her womb (Luk. 1:26-35).

That was a lot to process for Joseph and for Mary too! The only proof Joseph had for any of it was that before long Mary's womb would grow. What should he do? He decided to call off their marriage quietly. But before he did this, the Lord's angel now appeared to him in a dream. He

verified what Mary had said. Her Child was from the Holy Spirit. The Child in her womb was the Son of God incarnate!

TLH #76, 1-2 / ELH #113, 1-2 – “A Great and Mighty Wonder”

II. “She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

Just as Mary had been directed, the angel told Joseph that her Child should be named Jesus. So the name for this Baby came from God Himself. This name described what the Child would be and what He was sent to do. The name “Jesus” means “the LORD is salvation,” or “the LORD saves.” “[Y]ou shall call His name Jesus,” said the angel, “for He will save His people from their sins.”

So who exactly were “[this Child’s] people”? First of all, they were the Israelites, the Jewish people. As Jesus said years later during His public work, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mat. 15:24). But while His public activity focused on the Jews, He later sent out the apostles to “make disciples of all nations” (Mat. 28:19) – all people regardless of nationality.

And what did He come to “save His people” from? He came to save them “from their sins.” A sin is anything that is contrary to God’s holy law. It wasn’t just the Jewish people who had sinned, but all people. The apostle Paul writes, “For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:22-23).

Sin requires justice, since God is holy. You and I can’t save ourselves. We are spiritually bankrupt before God. We have nothing to pay our debt to His law. That is why God sent His only Son. He sent Him to take our place, to offer His holy life for us and to die in payment for our sin. The little Lord Jesus came to save you and me. He came to rescue us from eternal damnation. He came to win for us eternal life in heaven.

TLH #94 – “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”

ELH #145 – “What Child Is This?”

III. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

The first promise of a Savior came right after Adam and Eve disobeyed God and fell into sin. At that time, the LORD told the devil, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). So the Offspring of the woman would stomp on Satan’s head and sustain a bruise on His heel. In other words, the woman’s Offspring would fare much better than the serpent.

Thousands of years later, the LORD delivered another promise through the prophet Isaiah. Like a telescope bringing something far away into focus, the picture of how the Savior would arrive was becoming clearer. Isaiah prophesied that “the virgin shall conceive and bear a son.” How could

that be? How could a virgin conceive a child? The virgin Mary wondered the same thing some 700 years after this prophecy. But *“nothing will be impossible with God”* (Luk. 1:37).

The Holy Spirit formed an embryo in Mary’s womb who was no ordinary Person. This was Immanuel. This was the Son of God begotten of the Father from eternity, who had come to take on our flesh and blood. He came to take our sin and pain and sorrow to Himself and to die in our place. He came to give us His perfect righteousness and everlasting life. This was Immanuel – not “God far above us” or “God against us” – but “God with us.”

Jesus is “God with us.” He is your Savior, who still comes to take away your sin and pain and sorrow. He comes even now through His Word and Sacraments to give you His grace and salvation.

TLH #647 / ELH #137 - “O Little Town of Bethlehem”

IV. When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called His name Jesus.

If you were in Joseph’s position, would you have done what he did? In a certain respect you are faced with the same dilemma he was. The question is whether you believe the Baby in Mary’s womb was conceived in the natural way, or whether you believe He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. The way you answer that question matters.

If you say that Jesus was conceived in the natural way and had a biological father, then for you he can be no more than an influential person and a good teacher. He cannot be your Savior. A regular human being cannot save you any more than he can save himself, since all of us are sinners.

But if you believe that Mary was telling the truth, then you do have a Savior. Then you know the God who took on human flesh, so He could save you. Then you know Him who was *“born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law”* (Gal. 4:4). Then you know the One who offered up His holy body and shed His holy blood on the cross for the full and free forgiveness of all your sins.

The unbelieving world rejects the message of Christmas because it does not agree with reason or common experience. *“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are”* (1Co. 1:27-28).

God grant us the same confident faith of Joseph and Mary, who believed the Word, who believed that this Child was exactly what the angel said: the holy Son of God.

TLH #81, 1-4 / ELH #161, 1-4 - “O Jesus Christ, Thy Manger Is”

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