

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Lena, IL – 25 December 2022**  
**Christmas Day - Year A**

**1st Reading: *Isaiah 62:6-12***

**Psalm: 97**

**2nd Reading: *Titus 3:4-7***

**Gospel: *Luke 2:1-20***

**Sermon - *Vicar Thomas J. Mosbø***

In the name of the Father, ✙ and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

Today we celebrate the birthday of Jesus Christ. Now, according to our calendars, he should be 2,022 years old today. But according to some scholars he might really be 4 or 5 years older than that. Luke gives us some clues based on when Herod was king and when Augustus was the emperor. But even those dates can be difficult to pin down. But recently, it seems that the original calculations may have been correct, and that Jesus really is 2,022 years old.

And there has also been some debate about what day of the year Jesus was born. And again, Luke gives us some clues, based on when Zechariah, John the Baptist's father would have been serving in the temple. Those calculations, done by John Chrysostom, who lived in the fourth century, indicated that Jesus would have been born sometime between December 25th, when we celebrate Christmas here in the West and January 6th, when his birth is celebrated in the Eastern Church and when we celebrate the coming of the Wise Men. But either way, Jesus was probably born during the twelve days of Christmas.

But why does any of that matter? It matters because we are not just telling a nice story here. Jesus, the Saviour, the incarnation of God himself, was actually born at a specific point in human history, and in a specific place: the little town of Bethlehem in Judea, now in the occupied West Bank in Palestine.

And so we are celebrating a real birthday here, indeed the most important birthday of all. And we do so in the way we celebrate anyone's birthday: We sing happy birthday songs, which we call Christmas carols. We decorate our houses, and the church, we light lots of candles, and we give presents.

We all have birthdays, of course. Some of you seem to have discovered that my birthday was just a few days ago, so thank you to those who wished me a happy birthday. It was pleasant and cozy, while outside there was snow on snow on snow. And today is actually our grandson, Tyrion's third birthday. I may have told you this story before, but when he was born, another of our grandchildren, Michael, our other daughter's son, who was 6 at the time, asked if they had named the baby Jesus. His mother told him, "No", but he insisted: "The angel said a baby boy would be born on Christmas and they were supposed to name him Jesus." Very perceptive, as Michael often is.

But the baby born to Mary in Bethlehem, 2,022 years ago, was named Jesus, the Saviour, Christ the Lord. And so we've been singing happy birthday to him in lots of carols last night, this morning, and will continue over the next 12 days. One of them, which we are not singing this morning, but which would have been especially appropriate this year, is *In the Bleak Midwinter*, by Christina Georgina Rossetti:

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,  
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;  
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow  
In the bleak midwinter, long long ago.

She then goes on to describe how heaven and earth are not big enough to hold him, but that "in that bleak midwinter, a stable sufficed to hold the Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ" and that his mother Mary "worshipped the beloved with a kiss".

And in the final verse, Rossetti draws on the tradition of bringing gifts to the Christ child - the Wise Men bring Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. We sing the song about the little drummer boy who plays his drum as his gift. And I remember as a lad reading a Russian story about a boy trudging through the snow to bring a gold coin to the church to give to the Christ child - something miraculous happened, but I don't remember what. I've tried to look up the story, and found a number of variations on this theme, most of which end up with some aid being given to a poor child. And then there's Good King Wenceslas, who, on the day after Christmas takes his faithful page with him to bring food and warmth to a poor peasant.

Nor should we forget Saint Nicholas, the real Santa Claus, the bishop of Myra in the fourth century, who secretly gave life-saving gifts to the poor, especially to children. His first such deed was to secretly throw a sackful of gold through the window of a girl who was about to sell herself into slavery for the sake of her sisters. The gold landed in the girl's stocking, which had been hung up to dry by the fireplace. And so we all hang up our stockings now in the hope that Saint Nicholas, an eternal servant of Jesus Christ, will bring us aid as well.

And if you will forgive me for stealing this idea from the old Christmas movie, *The Bishop's Wife*, there is one stocking that often remains unfilled, the stocking of the one whose birthday we now celebrate. What gift will we bring the baby Jesus? We give gifts to our friends, to our family, and we try to follow the tradition of giving gifts to the poor at Christmas time. Jesus himself said that what we do for the least of his children we do for him. And so, yes, we do also fill his stocking.

But the most important gift we can give to Jesus on his birthday is in the last verse of Rossetti's hymn:

What can I give him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb  
If I were a wise man I would do my part;  
Yet what I can I give him - give my heart.

Amen!

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