

"An Invitation to the Wedding in Bethlehem's Stable" -- John 1:14

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Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:10-11).

Dearly Beloved,

We are gathered here this day, in the presence of God to be witnesses to the Wedding in Bethlehem's stable. Wedding, you say?! No doubt, you are asking yourself that Lutheran question, "What does this mean?" In fact, you may be wracking your brain and recalling that in all the years that you have been involved with church, and in all the times you have heard the Gospel accounts of the Christmas story, and with all the children dressed up as angels and shepherds, you don't ever remember hearing about any wedding taking place in the little town of Bethlehem. So maybe you are thinking that a lost book of the Bible has been found where the joining of this man, Joseph, and this woman, Mary, is written and that it took place in Bethlehem's stable.

Let me ease your dilemma by telling you that no lost book of the Bible has been found, and indeed, I am not even speaking about Joseph and Mary at all. There were already husband and wife before they arrived in Bethlehem. In fact, I'm not talking about a marriage either; but rather, about a wedding. Christmas is about the joining together, the wedding, the personal union of God and man.

The Savior had to be man in order to be under the Law and in order to suffer and die. The Savior had to be God so that the Law could be fulfilled, that a sufficient sacrifice would be made for the world, and that the devil and death might be overcome.

The Christmas message of Good News concerns the Incarnation of God. We confess this truth every time we answer that Lutheran question, "What does this mean?" with the answer, "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord."

The truth is, that the wedding spoken of in this personal union of the divine and the human took place nine months earlier than the Birth of Jesus. This joining together of God and man did not happen in Bethlehem of Judea, but in Nazareth of Galilee. The wedding took place when the virgin conceived by the Holy Spirit. But at that time, neither shepherds nor wisemen nor us could behold the Son of

God and Son of Man. His manifestation to the world would take place nine months later, after Mary gave birth to God and the Baby was placed in a manger.

On the basis of 14th verse of the Gospel Reading for this Festival of the Nativity of our Lord, I am extending you ...

... *An Invitation to Witness the Wedding in Bethlehem's Stable!*

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Thus far the inspired and inerrant Word.

Dear fellows disciples of the Lord God, the Word has become flesh.

the invitation

Please accept the invitation to behold the miraculous wedding in Bethlehem's stable. We know where to go because the Lord has revealed it to us through the angelic announcement and Luke's chronicle. Therefore, as we did last night, let us do this morning as well. *Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.* We know what to look for since that sign has been given to us as well. *We will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.*

You may recall that in much of the artwork you have seen - from the Renaissance Masters to the Christmas card pictures - the Baby Jesus is portrayed with a golden hallow or aura about His head. The truth is that there was no such golden glow. If there had been, then the shepherds would have not been given the sign of simple swaddling cloths, but rather the task of searching for the Child with a glowing golden hallow.

genus idiomaticum

In the Scriptures, we are privileged to step into Bethlehem's stable and behold the Good News of great joy which is for all the people. The Savior has been born! There He is, the little Lord Jesus sleeping in a manger. He is wrapped in swaddling cloths so we can't see His arms, legs, or tummy. He is the Gift of Christmas to the world; and life any other Christmas gift, this Gift needs to be opened. Let's unwrap Him by removing some of those swaddling cloths. Ohhhh dear children, do you see what I see? *The Word became flesh* and the chord of the placenta has been cut and tied off. If that is true, and it most certainly is true, then we are able to say two things: God has a belly button and this Baby created the universe!

All of the attributes or characteristics of God and all the attributes of man, except for our fallen sinful nature, are communicated to and united in this Jesus. *The Word became flesh.* Therefore Jesus, Who is Wisdom, *Jesus increased in wisdom*

and stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:52). So also, this unchangeable One would now continue not to change as He grows up; and this eternal One without beginning or end would grow older; and this timeless One would spend time as an alien in Egypt; and this Creator would now take occupy various places in His creation, including a virgin's womb, an animal's manger, a fisherman's boat, a sinner's house, a criminal's cross, and a rich man's tomb. Dear people, *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*

genus maiestaticum

The hymn writer asks two questions and provides the answers:

- "What Child is this, Who, laid to rest, On Mary's lap is sleeping,
- Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, While shepherds watch are keeping?
- This, This is Christ the King, Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
- Haste, haste to bring Him laud, the Babe, the Son of Mary!
- Why lies He in such mean estate, Where ox and ass are feeding?
- Good Christian, fear; for sinners here, The silent Word is pleading."

The silent Word was in that manger, and is in heaven above, pleading because the full Divine Majesty is communicated to the person of Jesus and is exercised in and works through the human nature. Good Christian, that Baby we are looking at in the swaddling cloths is the Lord God Almighty. According to His Divine Majesty and because of the Incarnation, He now exercises Himself through the human nature. That Baby in Bethlehem's barn is sustaining the universe, praying for us, protecting wisemen as they journey to Him, watching over the shepherdless flocks of certain worshipping herdsmen, giving strength to a man named Simeon who would hold Him in his arms, sustaining the old woman named Anna at the temple, watering a specific tree from which a cross would be made, permitting nations to rise, allowing heads of state to fall, protecting His Church, and besides all that, He's got the whole world in His hands.

genus apotelesmaticum

The Word became flesh. But someone may ask why? Why did God become man? The Incarnation of God was for us and He came to be our prophet, our priest, and our king. But He is no ordinary king, for He comes to rule our hearts, minds, bodies, and souls, not with the iron rod of His Law, but with His Good News. According to His human nature, *all authority has been given to Him in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18).* So, even as a newborn infant in that crude cradle, He protects His Church and leads her to Glory. Therefore we join the psalmist in saying, *Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory (Psalm 24:9-10).*

Indeed, this King is also the High Priest Who does His sacrificial Work by giving Himself on the altar of the cross, for *the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His Life a Ransom for many (Matthew 20:28)*. This *He did once for all when He offered up Himself (Hebrews 7:27)*. We confess this fundamental and foundational Christian truth in the magnificent Easter hymn, "At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing" ...

"Praise we Him, Whose love Divine, Gives His Sacred Blood for wine,
Gives His Body for the feast -- Christ the Victim, Christ the Priest.
Alleluia!"

In order to accomplish this and to fulfill the Law perfectly in our place, *God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (Galatians 4:4-5)*. Now as the Risen and Ascended Christ, just as in the City of David when the silent Word was pleading, now He continues His priestly work as He intercedes at the Throne of God on our behalf, for *we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous (1 John 2:1)*.

As the God-man, Jesus fulfills His Divine work as Prophet by revealing Himself. We read and hear of the teachings and miracles of the Incarnate Word, Jesus, in the Inscribed Work, the Bible. The Lord, as Prophet, still reveals Himself today as the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world, doing so by the means of grace ... Word and Sacrament. You and I are privileged and graced to hear the Written Word, to believe this *Good Tidings of great joy (Luke 2:10)*, and to trust in *the Word become flesh*. Through the gift of His Word called the Bible and through the gift of His work called faith, *we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*.

the state of humiliation

You may be wondering about something. If Jesus is the Lord God Almighty and *in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9)*, why do we only see glimpses of His Divine glory in the Bible - like when He turned water into wine, when He was transfigured on the mountain, and when He rose from the dead? Well, we are speaking of the voluntary humiliation of the Son of God ... that according to His human nature, Jesus did not always and not fully use the Divine attributes communicated to the human nature. The Scriptures say it better: *He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:7-8)*.

the conclusion

Today we celebrate the Festival of the Incarnation. The Holy Spirit has performed the wedding by uniting the two. You and I are witnesses to this wedding as we journey to Bethlehem's stable and join those who gaze upon the Baby in a manger. We confess this wonderful mystery in the creed ... "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the virgin Mary."

The personal union continues today. Indeed, what God has joined together, neither man nor God puts asunder and will never to be separated. Jesus today remains true God and true man. Therefore, dear fellow witnesses, thank you for accepting the invitation to the wedding in Bethlehem's stable and to behold the Baby Who is our Redeemer. Indeed, *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.* Amen.

Now to Him Who is able to establish you according to my (the) gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith -- to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. (Romans 16:25-27) Amen.