

Sermon Christmas Eve, 2015
 Pastor James Preus
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 Matthew 1:18-25

² And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.

² (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

³ And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

⁵ To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

⁶ And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

⁸ And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

⁹ And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

¹⁰ And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

¹² And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

Merry Christmas dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

People who know a little bit about me know that I have a lot of older brothers. And, as I'm sure many kids do, I looked up to my brothers. I was proud of them. I wanted to be like them. If one learned to play piano, I wanted to play piano. If one joined the wrestling team, I wanted to join the wrestling team. I was glad to have my brothers, even though they weren't perfect. Now, if a young boy can take pride in sharing in flesh and blood with ordinary teenagers, imagine how we should feel, seeing who *our* brother is.

Do you know who Jesus is? He is God. God the Son himself was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary while she was still a virgin. God shares *our* flesh and blood. God is *our* brother! Just as all mankind has the same first parents, Adam and Eve, all mankind shares in the same flesh and blood. So when God became a human, he became the brother of all people; Africans, Asians, Europeans, all people of every continent and skin color. God is united to them all in flesh and blood.

He didn't do this for angels. Angels cannot boast of sharing a nature with God himself. God didn't join the angels in a hope to save Satan and his crew. And even if we were angels, with all their splendor, grace, and heavenly power, we would wish that we were humans, so that we could boast of having God himself as our brother.

And notice too, how God became a man. Jesus is currently both God and man, even as he lives and reigns in heaven governing both his Church and the entire universe. Christ is not humiliated in any way now, but he is exalted above all things in power and might. Yet he is still human. Jesus did not need to humiliate himself to become a human. Yet, he did. God was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary. God grew as an embryo and fetus, depending on the nutrients from his mother just as all life depends on him for daily bread. And so, Christ joined himself to even the smallest and most helpless of people, the unborn. This is why we Christians are so troubled by the wicked crime of abortion, which kills unborn children, who share the flesh and blood of God himself!

Although Christ certainly could have been born to the rich and powerful, he was born to the poor, occupying a manger as his first bed; his first roommates being cattle and donkey. He endured hunger and thirst, pain and sorrow, his earthly stepfather taught him to work with his hands. He suffered want. And in so doing, our big brother taught us how

to behave. Just as the little boy wants to emulate his big brothers in sports and music, so Jesus our brother bids us to imitate *him*. And how do we imitate our brother Jesus? Jesus did not come to be served but to serve. So we too, should seek to serve other people and put their needs above our own. Jesus certainly could consider certain works beneath him, yet he endured everything life gave him, humbling himself to God's will. So we, who certainly *cannot* claim any good and honest work to be beneath us, since we are not God in the flesh, should certainly accept our duty and not think of ourselves more highly than we ought. Jesus endured sickness and pain, even being tempted in every way just like us, except without sin, so we too should endure sickness and pain, and even temptation knowing that our brother too endured such things.

We should all be overjoyed that God is our brother. We should beam with pride that God joined our human race. And we should try to imitate our big brother in his willingness to serve and his humility here on earth. And yet, this is not the reason we have gathered to celebrate Christ's birth. We must not simply have Jesus' as our brother in the *flesh*. Every human being on earth can claim Jesus as a brother in the flesh. Yet not every human being will be saved, because not every human being can claim Jesus as his brother in the *Spirit*.

So how can you claim Christ as your brother in the Spirit? Saint Paul writes, "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:26-27) It is through faith in what Christ has done for you that Jesus becomes your brother in the Spirit. Jesus says, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it." (Luke 8:21) God became

our brother according to the flesh, so that we might become adopted sons of God according to the Spirit.

Christ must be your brother through faith. This means that you need to believe that he became your brother, to share in your flesh and blood, for your sake. The angel said to Joseph, “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” Jesus was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary, he became your brother in flesh and blood, body and soul, so that he could save you from your sins. The Angel gave the same message to the shepherds, “For unto you is born this day in the City of David, a *Savior*, who is Christ the Lord.” God did not become a man simply to give us a good example in Christ Jesus. If that were true, Jesus would simply be a second Moses to condemn us for not keeping God’s Law. But rather, Jesus is our *Savior*.

What does it mean that Jesus is our Savior? What does it mean that Jesus will save his people from their sins? First, it means that we *need* a Savior. It means that our sins are a *problem!* As we’ve already seen by Christ our brother’s example, we can’t meet the mark. We’re supposed to be willing to help our neighbor. We’re supposed to be humble. We’re supposed to control our tongues, not be lazy, not lie, not get unjustly angry. We’re supposed to overcome temptation. And yet, we fail at these. And when we look at what God’s Law demands of us, and when we look at how perfectly Jesus kept God’s Law, it brings us to shame. Our sinful flesh doesn’t want to boast in Jesus’ accomplishment. Rather we look at Jesus as a kid with a GPA of 0 looks at his older brother, who’s graduated *magna cum laude* from the most prestigious university. Our sin makes us hate Jesus, our brother.

Secondly, that Jesus is our Savior, who will save his people from their sins means that we sinners should not hate Jesus. Jesus came to save *us*. We do not gather here tonight as perfect Christians, ready to boast of how we have imitated Christ our brother so perfectly. We don't gather tonight, because we're good enough to stand before God. We gather tonight as sinners. Sinners, who need help. Sinners, who are ashamed that we have thought more highly of ourselves than even of Christ Jesus. We gather as sinners, who are ashamed that we have not gladly heard God's Word, that we have lived as if we never darkened the door of the church. We gather as sinners, sorry for our sins. And we gather *here*, because Jesus came to save *sinners*. There is no better place for a group of sinners to meet than in church with Jesus.

Jesus didn't live a perfect life simply to give you an example of how to live. Jesus lived a perfect life, because you've failed to. And Jesus didn't die on the cross, because he deserved to die. Jesus died on the cross, because *you* deserve to die. And that is why we sinners gather tonight. That baby, of whom angels sing, whom shepherds run to see, whom Mary holds in her loving arms, came to save you. And he did it by dying for you. And all who believe this receive something even greater than having Christ as their brother in the flesh. Those who believe this receive Jesus as a brother in the Spirit. And if Christ Jesus is your brother in the Spirit, God is your heavenly Father. And God's children receive an inheritance. That inheritance is eternal life in heaven.

So merry Christmas, my brothers and sisters in Christ. And I call you brothers and sisters, because Christ Jesus our brother has made us so. He is our brother in flesh and Spirit. Amen.