

Second Eucharist of Christmas  
*Isaiah 52.7-10/ Psalm 98/ Hebrews 1.1-12/ Luke 2.1-20*  
St. Paul's Church, Halifax  
25 December 2007

Why a Birth?

~Paul H. Friesen~

'Christ is born. Alleluia!  
'He is born, today, Alleluia.'

This is the best morning on which to exchange such a wonderful greeting! Let's try this Christian exchange right now!

'Christ is born. Alleluia!  
'He is born, today, Alleluia.'

Every thing is different after a birth. Just ask anyone in Canada related to any infant born last night. And all of us here this morning are related to Christ, born last night.

Perhaps you know that Christ's birth wasn't the part of his life that Christians first celebrated. The New Testament letters of St. Paul and the other Apostles, were written down in the early years after Christ's life. And they do talk an awful lot about Jesus Christ's death and resurrection and ascension to glory but, in fact, not so much (and less directly) about Christ's birth.

And so this morning we hear the author of *The Epistle to the Hebrews* tell us: 'In these last days [God] has spoken to us by a Son...He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being...When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.'<sup>1</sup> What we call the incarnation of God is quite clear, but not with the detail and attention that was first given to the first part of the life of Jesus.

The Gospels stories, which were passed on by mouth for a few decades and then written down about thirty or forty years after the Epistles, do give much greater attention to Christ's birth.

*The Gospel According to Mark* doesn't actually talk about the birth of Christ, and *The Gospel According to John* talks about it with the kind of language that the Epistles do. But, Matthew and Luke give great attention to the birth of Jesus Christ. And today we give thanks for their Gospels.

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version* unless noted otherwise.

Through the mercy of God, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the early church began to realize very early on that *if the end of Jesus' earthly life was so important, so was his birth*—and in fact every part of Christ's life. Why?

Well, the whole life of Christ had to be important for Christians, who after all, like Jesus, were born and lived and died, and hoped for a new life after death. *Our ancestors in the faith didn't settle for a part of Jesus, but claimed his whole life for their whole life.*

The birth of Jesus isn't just interesting and it isn't just charming and it isn't just something to be remembered in Church on Christmas morning. The birth of Jesus became a pillar of the faith. As we shall say it in the poetry of the Creed:

*Who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.*

One of the early prayers of the church, which came from the Holy Land itself was borrowed by the creators of the Church of England (the Anglican Church) in the age of the Reformation. Christ's whole life is contained in something called the Litany, and it is still used by Christians, and among them Anglicans.

This part of the litany goes this way:

By the mystery of thy holy Incarnation; by thy holy Nativity; by thy Baptism, Fasting, and Temptation, *Good Lord, deliver us.*

By thine Agony and bloody Sweat; by thy Cross and Passion; by thy precious Death and Burial, *Good Lord, deliver us.*

By thy glorious Resurrection and Ascension; by thy sending of the Holy Spirit; by thy heavenly Intercession; and by thy Coming again in glory, *Good Lord, deliver us.*

And here's the part about what it all means for us:

In all times of tribulation; in all times of prosperity; in the hour of death, and in the day of judgement, *Good Lord, deliver us.*

In other words, Jesus, God himself among us, shared our whole human lives, and that's exactly why we can call upon him to 'deliver us', to come to our aid. He was truly one of us, and yet he was truly 'God of God' and 'Light of Light'.

Jesus Christ can 'save us' in every circumstance because he has both lived our lives, and is at the same time one with the God who made us. *We are offered all of Jesus for all of our lives, not a part of Jesus for part of our lives.*

And this morning we celebrate the birth that brought Jesus among us as a helpless infant. It is a birth that should have meaning for us this week, or it wouldn't be described in our Bible.

These are the facts about the birth, according to the *Gospel of Luke*, which we have just heard:

>Israel was under the occupation of a foreign, pagan, empire and kept its soldiers posted throughout the lands, and despised Jewish belief.

>A young Jewish peasant woman, Mary, had been told in a vision that she was about to become a mother, by the Spirit of the God she worshipped, of a saviour-king, the long expected Messiah

>She was actually pregnant but officially a single woman, engaged to a man named Joseph, a lowly carpenter, as the story opens.

>Joseph and Mary got caught up in a major tax census imposed by the Romans, meaning a difficult and expensive journey.

>The local inn had no last-minute room for her, so she gave birth in the little barn behind the inn.

They are not cheerful facts. The story is full of uncertainties, impracticalities, anxieties, and fears. The story is so much like our own human stories, isn't it?

By the mystery of thy holy Incarnation; by thy holy Nativity; by thy Baptism, Fasting, and Temptation, *Good Lord, deliver us.*

We have heard the earthly facts, but then there are the divine realities, the Christmas realities.

>Mary had been told she had 'found favour with God' and she had been told 'the power of the Most High will overshadow you' and she had been told 'For nothing will be impossible with God.'

>The Angel of the Lord had sung out the good news of the birth of the Saviour-King to nearby shepherds and came to acknowledge the infant King in the manger and returned to their fields singing God's praises.

> Mary 'treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.'

These are the spiritual realities we celebrate in worship, the realities that change everything in our lives. By these our Good Lord will deliver us!

This is Christmas Day, and whatever we face today, whatever facts describe our situation, the spiritual realities of Jesus Christ change it all. The Christmas

realities brought by Christ cannot leave things the same once they are lodged in our hearts.

No political power, no lowly status, no difficult personal circumstances can overwhelm the spiritual realities of the whole life of Christ. Jesus Christ was born into the universal human experience, and has lived every part of our life before us.

The Christmas story is being repeated today. God has promised to shadow all of us under his wings with Mary. Nothing is impossible with God, because it wasn't for Mary. And someone, somewhere is singing God's praises. And it's all because Christ shared all of his life with us. Let's join them and say:

'Christ is born. Alleluia!'

'He is born, today, Alleluia.'

Amen.