

**Jesus is born, Alleluia! | Isaiah 52:7-10; John 1:1-14 | LUMC | Dec 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

Dear Church family and friends: today I am tremendously excited about reaching the end of another joyous Christian year. A year that reminds me that I am not alone in my faith journey. I belong to God, my creator, my savior, and in whom I am greatly pleased. I hope you feel the same positive vibes in this Christmas season. This Christmas and going forward may you vow to keep being in the presence of our savior, our Lord. Whereas worldly people take pride in their wealth, political connections, economic power, and social standing among mortals, it is my prayer that we pride ourselves for being in the presence of the one who saved us. Friends, we have a reason to be excited and live excitedly through this Christmas: Jesus is yet again with us! Jesus gave us both physical and spiritual life when we are born again! without Christ we cannot know how to live; It is one way to exist but quite another to know how to live, to know and understand the purpose of life, and to know the way to eternity. Only Christ can provide guidance necessary for rightful living; He is light that shines on our feet.

Isaiah prophesied the birth of Jesus around 800 BCE, and Jesus was born around 1 AD to herald peace among those who believe in Christ's reign. Isaiah knew that those who follow Christ will prepare for salvation and continue being guided by Scripture (the Good News). Jesus redeems sinners to live peaceful and joyful lives. There is no question that those redeemed lift their voices to sing praise songs to the Lord.

During this prophesy from Isaiah, the Israelites were under Assyrian oppression without a cause, and they were charged heavy taxes. The Israelites had left Egypt—a country they were invited as guests only—to be oppressed again. These two political episodes made the Israelites doubt God's presence and God's promises of making them a people and a nation. The Israelites were between a rock and a hard place; God through Isaiah promised to rescue them from the Assyrians and from wherever they were scattered in the world.

The savior who Isaiah prophesied was to bring hope and inner peace despite the Israelites' political instabilities. Regardless of those woes, God was (and is) always faithful. He ultimately made the Israelites a nation. And, he opened salvation for all those people who believe in him. He is a faithful God. He constantly fulfills promises. God had promised Abraham to make the Israelites a nation. They are a nation today despite many years in the making. God through Jesus promised a savior to sinners all over the world, and the world we live in is a better place because so many people feel Christ's presence in their lives. They feel reclaimed and provided with peace and joy—alleluia!

Jesus is not an illusion, a phantom, or a mythical creature. We have convincing evidence that Jesus was born, lived, died, and resurrected. There is evidence of his existence from religious history, the Roman government historical account, and Jewish political history. Jesus was born at the time of Caiaphas, the high priest. It was the time of Caesar Augustus, the Roman emperor, and of Quirinius, the governor of Syria.

Jewish history also confirms that Jesus was born during the time that the Jews had to register for a census.

Archologists have also confirmed the location of Jesus' burial site and the existence of the empty tomb<sup>1</sup> that also confirms the resurrection. Most sites Jesus visited or where he preached are well preserved right up to today. Wilson, a second World War veteran from my home congregation visited the site where Jesus rose to heaven and found Jesus' footprint matching his foot size. Therefore, Jesus is real.

St John, one of Jesus' disciples also confirms Jesus was a real human and real God; he existed before all creation. Jesus participated in creating everything, and that "nothing was created without him". Though other Gospels describe Jesus' birth, John clearly presents Jesus's divinity and humanity—Jesus is both God and human. John says Jesus existed before all things were made. Jesus was the Word that was made flesh. When God decided to save humanity from its sins, Jesus voluntarily agreed to come to earth through the virgin birth. He was born and lived among mortals to experience hardships, hunger, and pain of being misunderstood. Jesus died as a human to win us and bring us back to fellowship with God, and to birth the church.

Jesus initiated his earthly ministry, left it to the disciples, and went back to enjoy the glory he shared with God the Father. Jesus resumed the position he occupied before the creation. Jesus is the Word, but not in the sense of "word" we use in our speech. The term Word here refers to a person. Jesus is the Word made flesh (human) as well as coexisting eternally with God, and existing before all things were made. Jesus agreed to become flesh—a human coming down to our standards, so we can see God through him

The ancient people did not see God. They heard his voice though. They described God as a burning fire, a calming wind, a star that lit the earth, a cloud that provided shade, etc. Jesus Christ reveals the image of God and assumes the role of God by being a savior, the light of the world, and the salt that provides taste to erase bitterness. God looks like us—we are created in his image. Jesus tells Phillip "If you have seen me, you have seen God." We no longer walk in darkness. We are people of the light, the light of Christ that will guide us into eternity.

Jesus makes a frightening claim we all need to pay attention to: Jesus says, "He came in the world and world did not know him". This is the world he created, the world he died to save and provide hope, peace, and joy. This very world did not pay attention to his presence or his saving grace. This is a hard claim we cannot deny because there are haters of God, there are true believers, and there are "lukewarmers" in the world.

There are people who could care less about being Godly. They live in the world as if they created it. They manipulate everything as if it all belongs to them. They have little respect for others. They decide how to live and respond to their failures either with denial or arrogance.

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<sup>1</sup> Lan Boyle. A National Geographic journal: "secrets of Christ's Tomb." Nov 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Last week's sermon reminded us that such people control their destiny. These people live according to their own understanding, and cause others to experience their hatred, backstabbing and power struggles. This category of people was going about their business the day Jesus was born. They did not pay attention to the excitement taking place in the city. Some may not pay attention even this week. We have a mission to them. They may be our friends, relatives, neighbors, or even family members.

There are however, Christians who live according to Jesus' teaching and follow God wherever God leads them. I enjoy being in the company of those who believe there is a God who gives them life and being. There is a God who controls the universe and offers the best advice on how to approach life's struggles. These are the very people whom Isaiah prophesied would raise their voices to sing songs of joy to the Lord. These are the people who know peace and share peace with others. They enjoy every bit of their lives trusting the Lord for their provisions of the next day. I identify with these people. John says these believers are children of God, not born of blood or the will of the flesh or a person's willpower, but by God's grace. John says these faithful believers are given power to be the children of God, it's this power, which makes their faith tick.

A third set of people fall in-between the two sets described above. Despite striving to live Godly; they fail and end being lukewarm. They often become actors in worldly vices. Why do some people behave this way? There can be several reasons. I can only offer my opinion. I think the problem arises from misuse of their God-given willpower; they tend to think every success is out of our own effort. Many people do great things and succeed, but they attribute their success to their own efforts. They fail to acknowledge the power of God in their doing.

Let us take farming for example. Farmers can manipulate plant genes to overproduce the crop they want. People have made many chemicals to help in farming and minimizing plant diseases. But do they care how they affect the plant's natural abilities or environment through their efforts to overproduce?

People have also managed to get chickens to lay two eggs in fewer hours than normal. They have manipulated animals the same way to produce meat and milk as they want. And now we are debating on human gene editing. Ethicists see danger in trying to make humans who fit our needs, a superhuman with perhaps less disease and endowed with long life?

These and many other successes, whether good or bad, may have led some people to think there is no God, or if God exists, He is at the bottom of their priorities. I have no doubt that in many ways we have assumed the role of God, and may have become small gods in our own rights.

I see the same problem existing in the power structure. For example, when parents share their roles with children, some children tend to dominate their parents by demeaning them. They think they know better and can perform better. They try to exploit and control their parents. I have seen these dynamics play out, with some children assuming powers to make health decisions for their parents.

Our God's willingness to share the roles of creating and supervising creation has made some people ignore God and take over the decision making.

During this season God is asking us to recall that Jesus became one of us (in the flesh) and lived with us to make us see God up-close, and share God's grace and glory and live in truth.

Amen.