***Who Is Born?***

**LSB Hymn #385**

**From Heaven Above To Earth I Come**

12.24.2023 – Christmas Eve

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Blessed Christmas Eve to you.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior tomorrow, we gather this night in eager anticipation. We consider again the events of His birth, recalling the story as we joyously remember that on the morrow, God, who took on human flesh in the womb of a virgin named Mary, comes forth into His creation to Redeem us.

How should we celebrate? How should we rejoice? The birth of Christ transformed the entire creation He spoke into being at the beginning. It is sad that there are some confusing things that are believed in the hearts and minds of people concerning Jesus as God’s Christ. But, that is why the same historical events are celebrated, the same story told again and again, hopefully letting Scripture speak rather than speculation.

As we gather this evening, I have an idea of what you may be thinking. At a guess, you looked at the hymns for today, and you saw the one with 6,485 verses. OK, a slight over exaggeration, it only has 15 verses. But you did note that we are going to sing all 15 of verses of that one particular hymn during the course of our service – in two installments – some are a bit disappointed.

It's almost like some people have something better to do today than being in God's house to celebrate the birth of Christ.

It's almost like some people want to be here, fulfill their duty, and get back to the party that has become the focus for so many Christmas celebrations.

It’s almost like there is some better way to be doing what we are gathered together to do this night. Some want something to happen here which will be emotionally attractive. We want something to tug our heart strings and doesn’t require a lot of thought. We want something to just make us feel good!

This is the service in anticipation! It is the EVE of the Nativity of our Lord. It is the EVE of the celebration of the birth of Christ; here, in this time, in this space. And there is no better hymn to help us focus our attention on God's Christ than this one.

No doubt, there are some really nice hymns. Some of them are incredibly familiar. Some set a certain mood. Some move our hearts and make us feel certain things. But it is my prayer that this hymn would become for you, as it has for many people for many generations, the quintessential hymn of celebrating our Savior’s birth.

Just so you know, when this hymn appeared in print for the first time, it bore a heading which Luther gave it. It read, “Ein kinder lied auff die Wienacht Christi.” For those of you who don't know German, that means, “A children's song on the birth of Christ.” Luther wrote this hymn to be a sort of a Christmas pageant for his children, a sort of staged presentation to be repeated year after year. It has a simple tune, and is in simple language.

The first five verses were written as if an angel were speaking. In fact, verses two through five are truly nothing more than a paraphrase of the words of the angel who spoke to the shepherds on the Judean hillside – announcing the birth of a Savior, Christ the Lord.

Verse 6 is in the plural, as if the shepherds are replying. If you consider it, we might say that it appears as if the angel had spoken to Luther’s children and they are joining the shepherds reply with enthusiasm. They also want to go with the shepherds and see this great thing that has come to pass, which has been revealed to them.

As we sing this hymn, we know the angel’s announcement is to us. The verses become our reply, the thoughts we express in grateful thanks to God’s work.

Note that verses 7 through 14 were written in the singular. It was intended that individual children give their own responses to the truth that they have heard from the angel. Verse seven shows this is an invitation to others besides the angels, that they might come to see this Holy child.

With the 8th verse the words are directed to the Christ child welcoming Him into the world, the sinful world. Why is He welcomed into our sinful world? To share our misery! Why? That He might share His joy with us!

Do you marvel at God’s Christ, as this hymn has the children marvel? That this One who is come among us, this Baby lying in the manger, is God? He deserves riches, luxury, and so much more. Instead, He deigns to come to us in such humble means.

In the 13th verse, we ask this Child, God in our human flesh, to prepare a place in our hearts. That He might live in our hearts! That He might reign in our hearts.

Faith knows that He will do such a thing, and in that faithful hope, the children rejoice in verse 14. And in the last verse, the angel rejoins them in song. This last verse returns to using the plural, for all creation joins together to give glory to God.

We could have examined this hymn in much greater detail, but I pray you do so on your own. If you do not have a copy of it, let me know, I’ll gladly get you one.

I pray that you would come to know that ***ALL*** our hymns have rich theology, a deep theology, yet theology that can be understood by little children.

Why did you come into God's house today? To do what you do every Christmas Eve; light some candles, sing familiar hymns, and feel good that tradition was observed?

Or did you come into this place to give thanks to God? To praise and glorify His holy name because the Creator of all that exists chose to give up His glory, might, honor, power, and Kingdom to take on our flesh, in order that He might fulfill for you the whole will and law God, and then allow His perfection in your flesh to be crucified, and to die for your sins?

Yes! That is it exactly!

This work of Christ is why the Angels declare, “Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord.”

This One who has come to save us, God's Christ, where will you find Him? This One who defeats sin and death, where will you find Him? This One by whom the heavens and earth were made, where will you find Him?

Wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger! Yes! He is still to be found there! The swaddling clothes and manger which hide Him still are; Word, Water, Bread and Wine. Word and Sacraments are the Means by which Christ is hidden and still comes to us.

So what will you do, now that you know all this?

What will you do with the knowledge that your God did all this for you, that He gave up everything to save you?

Does your heart leap for joy?

It should!

Can your lips now keep silence?

No! Not if you really know, understand, and believe the truth that has been proclaimed to you. Instead, your joyful tongue will not keep silent.

You must sing with joyfulness of heart the sweetest ancient cradle song! Do you know it?

Glory to God in the highest and peace to His people on earth!

(sing last verse)

*Glory to God in highest heav'n,*

*who unto to us His Son has giv'n!*

*While angels sing with pious mirth*

*A glad New Year to all the earth.*

 In Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.