

Celebrating Jesus as the Way

Christmas Eve – 12/24/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.
Text: Luke 2:10-11 Pastor Keith Besel

vv. 10-11, “**And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord’.**”

Introduction

- ✘ In our Advent midweek services our sermons looked at the Old Testament Prophets, and even John the Baptizer as the first New Testament prophet, and their call to us all to “*Prepare the Way*” for the coming of Jesus.
 - ➔ Tonight on Christmas Eve our focus changes from one of preparation to celebration.
- ✘ Yes, at Christmas we adore the Christ Child as the angels and the shepherds did. When Mary visited Elizabeth, Elizabeth said that John leaped in her womb as in joy and adoration; as a greeting toward the Child within Mary’s womb (Lk. 1:44).
 - ➔ At Christmas we worship as the Magi did on Epiphany. Herod asked the Wise Men to help him worship this Child, even as his later, murderous actions said, “Not so”.
 - ➔ At Christmas we rejoice as angels bring good news and the heavens themselves shout out in praise of the newborn Child. Simeon saw the Child and blessed Him when His parents brought Him to the temple for he saw Israel’s Glory and the Gentiles’ Light. Anna also gave thanks with joy for the Christ child’s planned redemption.
 - ➔ At Christmas we honor our Lord and God whom the Father honored at His baptism and transfiguration; at His many miracles and resurrection. Luke 4:3 says that even Satan knew that the Father proclaimed Jesus to be “My beloved Son”.
- ✘ Yes, at Christmas we wonder, “*What Child is This*” as the disciples wondered in Matthew 8:27, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey Him?”

I. Today we celebrate Jesus as The Way

- ✘ So, at Christmas we no longer prepare. Instead we celebrate! Though their timing has been premature, we’ve heard echoes of this celebration in the malls and the stores as they have played the carols and greeted us with the wish that we have a “Merry Christmas”. This is the time that many folks long for peace and good will, care about hunger and want, seek relief from evil and wrong and hunger for righteousness and dignity.
 - ➔ Even though they may not readily acknowledge it, all of these things exhibit our world’s deep-seated desire to return to the Father’s home. And now the Christ has come; the one who said in John 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”. Yes, Jesus is the Way.
- ✘ The early Christians were actually known as followers of “the Way”. They believed and confessed the Babe of Bethlehem, crucified in Jerusalem, risen from the dead, as the Way, the answer to men’s deepest needs. Acts 4:12 tells us that “...there is salvation in no one else”.
 - ➔ These people of *The Way* are the ones that Paul, before his conversion, wanted to drag to Jerusalem for punishment. But Jesus Himself interrupted Paul’s plans for evil and informed him that He, Jesus was the one that he was really persecuting (Acts 9:1-5).

→ Later, across the Aegean Sea at Ephesus, there was “no little disturbance concerning the Way”, Acts 19:23 says, because the radical commitment and laser focus upon this promised Christ by His followers was ruining the livelihood of those in the idol-making industry (Acts 19:23-41).

✘ This only Way to the Father; the One conceived in Nazareth, whose birth in Bethlehem we celebrate tonight, as Simeon said, “is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel” (Lk. 2:34). He is the One whom the angels announced as Christ, Lord and Savior; the One promised by the Father many ages before.

→ It really is a very long road of generations from the angels with flaming swords that kept Adam and Eve out of the Garden after God promised He would send a Savior to conquer the devil and pay for the sin that they had committed by eating the forbidden fruit, to the angels now in our Gospel Reading who are announcing good news for all the people on earth.

→ But it is a path, a road, a way, a highway across nations and islands; continents and oceans; trod by prophets; by Wise men; by shepherds; by Mary and Joseph; by the bloodstained martyrs; by pastors and teachers preparing the way for us ... for us to meet the Lord and have Him here with us this moment “where two or three are gathered in His name” (Matt. 18:20).

II. Knowing the Way, We Celebrate

✘ But have you ever considered this question? What if there were no way back to the Father from our corrupt way of sin? Would we be able to find Him on our own? Would we be forever doomed and lost? Would there be anything to celebrate?

→ Some images on faraway temples depict God as knowing only sex and orgies. Some images, now resting in museums, make Him out as cruel and angry – a god who needs to be appeased with human sacrifices. Some images, especially those taught in tales and myths of literature from a golden age of the past, make gods “more human than we” are, full of lust, envy, and anger; schemers of evil; thieves, liars, and weaklings.

→ Others cry out, “It is impossible to know the way to God or God’s way to man,” even for those who offer themselves as guides through fortune telling and other forms of satanic arts.

✘ Look, we all have to admit it, even the best of humans, along with our man-made gods are imperfect. And each year’s graduating class will be no better than the year before, because we have all inherited our past of sin and corruption.

→ Psalm 14:3 proclaimed this of humankind ages ago, “They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one”. Even if you were to search out and choose the most holy and pious of your kinsfolk, they would be the first to call themselves, like Paul, “the foremost of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15).

→ Even if we were to appeal to those who are identified in Scripture as being great in faith; those like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Peter, Paul, Elijah; even Mary or Joseph; even if we were to appeal to them for help in providing a potential “way” to God, they would all be unable to do so. Because, you see, they are people just like you and me for whom God came. They, too, would celebrate tonight because their way to God has come in the blessing announced by the angels!

✘ Yes, this Christmas Eve we celebrate that our God has come in the flesh. Just as Isaiah said in our Old Testament Reading tonight, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”.

→ Jesus Himself even gave us the reason to celebrate His birth as the way, when He prayed for us on the night of His arrest, “And this is eternal life, that they (that’s you and me and all mankind); that they know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (Jn. 17:3).

III. Celebrating Jesus as the Way

✘ Moses asked God at the burning bush, “What is Your name?” And God said, “I AM who I AM...say this to the people...’I AM has sent me” (Ex. 3:13-14). Besides Him there is no other. He is God of all gods, Lord of all lords. “I AM” – in Hebrew, it is “Yahweh”, was a comfort for Moses.

→ In His ministry, Jesus, as the second person in the Triune God, used this same name to bring comfort to those who were troubled in His day. To those who were concerned about eating, Jesus said, “I am the Bread of Life” (Jn. 6:48). When He healed a blind man so that he could see, Jesus said, “I am the Light of the world” (Jn. 8:12). When speaking of His sheep, Jesus said, “I am the Door of the sheep,” enter by Me, the Door and be saved; and, “I am the Good Shepherd”, who “lays down His life for the sheep” (Jn. 10:7-11). To Martha as she grieved the death of her brother, Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the Life; he who believes in Me...shall never die” (Jn. 11:25-26). And to His disciples He said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing”.

→ To the churches and their pastors He promised, “I am the Alpha and the Omega ... who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” ... [I am] the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Rev. 1:8, 18). Even to those Christians who were suffering extreme persecution under Caesar, Jesus said, “I am the Root and the Descendant of David, the bright Morning Star” (Rev. 22:16).

✘ To each person from every walk of life; in every station of society; struggling any and every difficulty possible, including you and your struggles right now, Jesus is the Great I AM; Yahweh in the flesh, who came as the Babe in the Bethlehem manger just as His name “Jesus” literally means, “Yahweh saves”!

→ This, dear friends; this, dear Christians is the “good news of great joy” that the angels brought to the shepherds outside of Bethlehem; the “good news of great joy” that they bring to you and me this very night.

✘ And perhaps the greatest news for you and me as sinners; all of us in need of the one and only way back to our God and Creator is this from Jesus in John 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”.

→ Sing for joy; shout for joy; leap for joy (even if it’s only in your heart because you don’t leap like you used to) because Jesus, the one who’s birth we celebrate this day is the Way, your Way to forgiveness, new life, salvation and eternal peace with God! Amen.