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Eve of the Nativity of Our Lord
24 December 2012
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Luke 2:1-20

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

“In those days...” (Lk 2:1)

That’s how Christmas begins.

It begins in time. On a calendar. While ordinary stuff is going on.

Caesar Augustus didn’t have “Winter Break.”

He didn’t recess Congress until a couple days after Christmas.

No time off school for the kids,

or evenings filled with Christmas parties and caroling and eggnog and butter-spiced rum.

And for Quirinius, governor of Syria, there were no Christmas lights or candy canes,
or public debates about displaying a nativity scene on public property.

Instead, the offices were buzzing with the census.

Their HR department was handling all sorts of complaints:

about the difficulties of registering at this or that location,

about not having sufficient space at various inns and hotels,

and people were wondering if they could pre-register at a more convenient time.

Christmas began in the normal routine and busyness of life.

And at least for Mary and Joseph, it certainly wasn’t convenient.

It was a long trip and she was pregnant—at that point, even short trips aren’t much fun.

The main guest room was full, so they found a manger amongst the feeding troughs
to lay their newborn child.

It all happened **“In those days...”**

Sometimes the days our Lord chooses aren’t convenient for us.

There’s a load of reasons why Christmas should’ve come another time, another day.

Why now? – Or better yet, Why then?

Why at the time of Caesar’s census and during the governorship of Quirinius?

Why in Bethlehem in a manger to an old-man Joseph and a young virgin, Mary?

We don’t have a good answer for the why’s here.

But we do know that at this moment, **“In those days,”** the divine and earthly meet.

Those two worlds—Heaven and Earth—come together;

first in the womb, then in that manger.

So who is this child, this firstborn son, the baby swaddled, and lying in a manger?

The Angel Gabriel tells us and the shepherds that this infant lowly is the Savior, Christ the Lord.

This is God and man together:
 Heaven come to earth,
 Eternity poured into the flesh of time,
 the omni-present God located within the 21 inch long infant body.

Here the voice that created the Heavens and the Earth squeaks and squeals with newborn joy.
 Here the One who fashioned the woman from man now rests in woman's arms.

This is the Son—
 the eternal Son, the only-begotten Son of God,
 begotten of His Father before all worlds,
 God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God;
 And yet He is also the Son born of Mary, His mother, in time.

There are, then, two births of this Son.
 The birth of Christ from the Father was without mother;
 the birth of Christ from His mother was without father;
 and each birth was wonderful!
 The first was eternal,
 the second took place in time.
 The first in Heaven,
 the second here on Earth.

Now if there are two births, and we know one is here at Christmas,
 then it's only natural to wonder, "When was He born of the Father?"

Well, what do you mean, *when*?
 You're asking about "when," where you won't find any time.
 Don't ask about "when" *there*; ask about it *here*.¹

That's a good question, a question we can answer: "***In those days...***"
 the days of Caesar and Quirinius, the busyness of the census, and the full inn.

That was His birth in time, of Mary.
 But His being born of the Father, has no time—
 He was born eternally, always, forever, and still to come.

And that's the kicker.

There's a third birth.
 One was just over 2,000 years ago in backwater Bethlehem.
 Another is His eternal, divine birth—apart from and without time.
 And the third is His being born in you.

So let His mercy come to birth in our hearts!

¹ St. Augustine, "Sermon 89"

While His mother bore Him in her womb;
 let us now bear Him in our soul.
 While the Virgin was pregnant with the incarnation of Christ;
 let us grow large with the faith of Christ.
 She gave birth to the Savior, Christ the Lord;
 let us give birth to the Works of His hands, the fruits of His Spirit.

Our souls must be pregnant and fruitful with faith in God.
 We must bear Him to the world, show forth His light, and proclaim His word.

And how does all this happen?
 How does this Christ—born in time of Mary, and in eternity of God—
 how does He get born within us?

Well, as Advent has taught us, He comes by His Word.
 He comes to us in the Word of the Gospel, the bread of the Sacrament, the water of the font.
 He comes “*In these days*”—even now!

That’s how He came first to the Shepherds, by the voice and preaching of Gabriel.
 And that preaching of Christ for them, brought them to Him.
 It brought rough and rugged shepherds from their mundane life and work,
 to a cradle that held their infant priest and king.

And just like the shepherds, so it is for us.
 We were called from our day-to-day busy lives, to quickly come to the place where the child lays.
 We were called to receive Him and His gifts, freely and without our deserving them.
 There, with Mary and Joseph, we’re mesmerized by the infant joy.

And then, having been brought into His *real* presence,
 into His gifts of life, peace, joy, and forgiveness,
 we then, like the shepherds, return to our everyday life—to our many vocations.

But we return not in the same as we came.
 Like the shepherds, we return glorifying and praising God for all we had heard and seen,
 just as it had been told us (Lk 2:20).

And so the Word of God, the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins, the salvation of our souls,
 this Word of God conceives within us!

In these days, when it’s not always convenient,
 our God calls us to give birth to His Son for the sake of the world.

Not in flesh like Mary, but in faith:
 like shepherds, and saints, and Christians, from all times and everywhere.
 Merry Christmas!

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit