

PROCLAIM THE WONDROUS BIRTH

THE REV. MARK P. BRUESEHOFF

THE AMAZING BIRTH OF CHRISTIANS

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2011

ST. JOHN, OCEAN CITY, NJ

What is the most amazing gift you ever found under the Christmas tree? I'm sure we can all come up with one! For most children today it's all about looking for the first toy catalogue that comes in the mail and carefully going through it page by page. Circling things that are wanted, drawing arrows to them, and folding down the corners of the pages. And then they start working on their parents! Dropping hints! Telling them what pages to look at! You know the rest, being extra nice, at least when they are thinking about it. And calling us to the TV when that certain commercial comes on! And if that doesn't work, we are never too proud to just beg and plead. But you know what? It doesn't work! My parents still got me the things they wanted me to have, like socks and underwear.

Don't get me wrong! I cannot remember a Christmas when I was disappointed. I can remember the year my parents gave me a record player. I was 6! Yes, it played 78s! And yes, I still have it, in working order! The other years that stand out are the year I got my first "big" bike. Yup, still got that one too! And more recently, the year I got my power-washer!

But no matter how amazing the gift, or how well we remember it, nothing compares to the most amazing gift of all. **THE MOST AMAZING GIFT UNDER THE CHRISTMAS TREE IS THE BIRTH OF JESUS THAT GAVE BIRTH TO EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US, AS CHILDREN OF GOD.** What's so amazing about the birth of Jesus? Only everything, that's what!

The birth of Jesus is amazing, as is every other birth that has taken place since the beginning of time. For anyone who has seen the pictures that are produced by ultra-sound, and been able to make out the tiny features that are visible, we are amazed at the miracle of life.

But as amazing as the miracle of life in the womb is, there's an even more amazing miracle. And that is the miracle we celebrate today. Mary, a virgin, conceives a child. It never happened before! It hasn't happened since! Oh, there have been miraculous birth stories! We have been considering a few of them at our Midweek Advent Services. The birth of Issac! The birth of Samuel! The Birth of John the Baptist!

But Jesus' birth was truly amazing! The angel Gabriel said to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." Somehow the same power that God used at the beginning of creation, came over Mary in the miracle of the Incarnation, and the Virgin conceived a Child, Jesus.

The most amazing gift under the Christmas tree is the birth of the Baby Jesus. But don't go packing away the decorations quite yet! There is one more, most amazing gift under that tree. And that is the gift, the invitation, the blessing, that has been given to each and every one of us, to be **THE CHILDREN OF GOD.**

Called, gathered, enlightened and sanctified, is how Martin Luther put it! And today, we are the most amazing gift of Christmas. Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. **SO THERE!**

That is the Christmas Story, without the Red Rider BB Gun, and the dogs next door eating the family turkey. The Christmas Story is OUR STORY!

You and I cannot believe it unless that same Spirit visits us with the gift of faith. Today, if we have faith that Jesus was born by the power of God, than we have an amazing gift under our Christmas tree.

But how do we know He truly is the Son of God and not just someone with an overinflated ego? We know in the same way we know Jesus loves us. The Bible tells us so!

But note how the Bible describes Jesus, the Son of God born to Mary. He is not one who makes war; He is the Prince of Peace. He is not like other politicians; He rules with justice and righteousness. People in His kingdom are no longer slaves; He sets them free from sin and death. He calls them "sons and daughters" and children of God, made righteous and holy by Jesus, by faith. Those who believe in Jesus find God to be a loving Father.

Amazingly, God's gift for you and me under the Christmas tree is His own divine Son. And in a true miracle experienced every time Christians come to the Lord's Table, we receive this gift of Jesus, in, with and under the bread and the wine, in remembrance of Him and for our salvation. Now that's amazing!

Finally, the birth of Jesus is amazing because He is one of us. He came among us, to be one of us! And to do for us, what we cannot do for ourselves. He makes us right with God! And now, God our Father loves us and wants us not to run away from Him but to come to Him. And God comes to us in a form that no one can resist, a helpless human baby. A baby so adorable we have to hold and embrace Him.

Here's how it works. Suppose you are a stranger visiting Church. Nobody knows you! They gather in groups of people who know each other but ignore you. It's an unhappy experience for the visitor. But then try showing up at Church as a visitor with a newborn baby in your arms. Suddenly everybody is your friend. Everybody wants to see the baby. Everybody wants to hold the baby. Everybody wants to smile at the baby and have it smile back.

God in His great wisdom knows, that's how people are. He wants to smile at us and have us smile at him. He wants to be our friend. But He knows how we are. Anything we don't understand, we are afraid of. And so He overcomes our fears through His own Son Jesus, who takes on the flesh of a Baby who is just like us. And through this Baby, who one day would grow up to die for sinners and rise again, He makes us His friends. That's amazing! That's God's amazing gift for us under the Christmas tree.

Let us pray. Father in heaven, how amazing is this miracle! The Child is born! The Child is none other than Your own divine Son Jesus. And though He is divine, He is a human child, one of us. Remove all our fears that we might hold Him by faith and tell the story of our own amazing birth in the family of God. And may this joy be our Merry Christmas. And all God's children say,

Amen.

Sola Deo Gloria!