

Savior, Christ, and Lord

Luke 2:1-20

The Nativity of Our Lord, Christmas Midnight

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

The angel proclaims that the child in the manger is Lord.

In the Old Testament God used His personal name to communicate with Israel. In former times the personal name of God was translated as "Jehovah." That is probably the one with which we are the most familiar. In contemporary times with more precise scholarship some people have translated the name as "Yahweh." Most scholars of the Old Testament now use this term when explaining what God's name is.

Just before the time of our Lord Jews who spoke Greek wanted to translate the Old Testament into Greek so that they could read their Scriptures in the language which they grew up using. They had a problem. To them the name of God was so sacred that they no longer pronounced it so they did not want to transliterate it into Greek. Instead they translated it into Greek. But what Greek word did they use in order to translate the name of God? It would be like asking what word are you going to use to translate the name John or Ruth. These ancient Greek speaking Jews translated the name of God as "Lord."

They then produced an Old Testament which rendered each instance of the name of God as "Lord." Our contemporary English translations do the same thing. Every time the name of God is used in the Old Testament for the most part our English translations render it Lord. You can tell when they are doing it because the word "Lord" is usually in all capital letters.

So it became practice in the ancient world to call God "Lord." It makes sense. He is lord after all. So when the angel goes the shepherds and tells them that the child born in the manger is Lord, he is telling the shepherds that the child born in the manger is God.

This is a proclamation with which we are familiar. We confess that Jesus is God all of the time. We confess that Jesus is God in the face of a world that wants to deny it. Jesus is God. And at Christmas time where is God? He is lying in the manger.

Let us understand what this means. It means that God will nurse at the breast. It means that God will be completely dependent upon the care of Joseph and Mary. God was threatened with murder. God fled to Egypt. God grew up in Nazareth. He went to school there. He learned. If Nazareth had a sports team, God would have joined it. God would have fallen and broke bones or at least He could have. God would have bruised His knee and gone to Mary for help. God would have grown up. God would have had acne. God would have had hormones. God would have engaged in the trade of His adoptive father or his guardian, whatever it is that you want to call Joseph. God would have gone to work every day in a common trade.

Then later when God began His ministry, God was baptized. God received the Holy Spirit. God fasted and was hungry. God was tempted by the devil. And then not surprisingly God cast out demons, healed the sick, and raised the dead. Also not surprisingly God said controversial things. God preached good news. He was dependent upon the generosity of others while continuing to hold the authority to command the wind and the waves and the fig trees.

Then later God was betrayed. God was put on trial. They found Him guilty. When people put God on trial nowadays they are not doing anything new. They flogged God. They mocked God. They spit on God. God bled. They crucified God. He bled and died. God atoned for your sins. They buried God and on the third day God arose from the dead. He then ascended into heaven. No surprise there.

Where is this God who would do all of these things? At Christmas He is in a manger in Bethlehem. That is where He is. At least you can find Him.

But Jesus is not merely God, He is also Christ.

He is the fulfillment of Old Testament type and prophecy. He is the great high priest for which the world was waiting. He is the One who would offer the sacrifice that takes away the sins of the whole world. He is the One who would intercede between us and God the Father and speak a word of defense for us by appealing to His shed blood on our behalf with the Father.

He is the prophet who brings us the pure word of God straight from God Himself. He preaches it without wavering in confidence over whether or not the word of God can do what the Word of God says that it can do.

He is Immanuel whom Isaiah predicted. He is God with us. He is the righteous branch whom Jeremiah predicted. He is the descendent and heir of David just like all of the prophets predicted. He was born in Bethlehem just like Micah predicted. He is the suffering servant who underwent all kinds of pain and agony to atone for our sins like Isaiah predicted. He is the Lamb of God which the Passover taught us would come to redeem us. He is the new temple on earth where God dwells.

He is everything for whom the people of old hoped. There is not one promise of God in the Old Testament which does not find its "yes" in Him. Everything is fulfilled in Him. He is the healer for whom they had been waiting. He is the redeemer for whom they had been waiting. He is the prophet, priest, and king for whom they had been waiting.

Where is this fulfillment of prophecy? At Christmas time, He is lying in the manger.

And most importantly Jesus is Savior. In fact Savior is the most prominent title that the angel gives to our Lord when the angel makes his announcement to the shepherds. He says, "A Savior has been born to you. He is Christ, the Lord." He is Savior and then He is Christ and then He is Lord. He is Savior and then He is fulfiller of the prophecies of the Old Testament. He is Savior and then He is God in the flesh.

That means that Jesus is not here to perform an academic exercise. Jesus has not entered into a competition to see how many prophecies He can fulfill. Jesus is not here to prove some kind of point when it comes to the Old Testament.

He is not here to fulfill the prophecies in their entirety and yet make sure that He does it in a way that is a complete surprise to His opponents. He is not here to be coy.

He is not here merely as the fulfiller of prophecy in order to make some kind of point about how great He is that He can fulfill all of this complicated prophecy that was given over thousands of years and make sure that He gets it done in one short life time.

What would be the attraction of Jesus for us Gentiles if Jesus simply fulfilled Jewish Scripture and was done with it? He might be a Christ for the Jews, but He would not be a Christ for us.

Jesus is not here merely to fulfill prophecies, but in fulfilling prophecies He saves us. All of those prophecies in the Old Testament are there to point to the Savior who will save us from the worst of our problems.

This is not academic it is real. If it were only academic I guarantee you none of the ancients would have started all of this Christmas business. They did it because they were celebrating their salvation. They have passed that celebration down to us also.

Jesus is not God merely to be God.

Jesus is not a show off. He does not show off His divine power merely to show how great He is. He does not command the wind and the waves merely to demonstrate that He is God and that He has supreme authority over the creation. He commands them in order to save His terrified apostles from death.

Jesus does not show off His power by casting unclean spirits out of people. He casts out unclean spirits to show that Satan's empire has fallen. The unclean spirits come out. The same is true of His healings and His other miracles.

These are not exercises in power so that Jesus can show how great He is or how tough He is. If Jesus had come to earth merely to show off His great and divine power, He would never have allowed Himself to be arrested and betrayed, much less put to trial and crucified.

Jesus is not God for being God's sake. Jesus is God for your sake. It took God to save you from what you had gotten yourself into.

Therefore the confession of faith that says that Jesus is Christ and Lord is not spiritual mumbo jumbo that the Church utters in order to impress others. The confession that Jesus is Christ and Lord is necessary in order to support the confession that Jesus is Savior. And the confession that Jesus is Savior is the most important confession of them all.

We need a savior. Aren't all the heroes of our fiction and fantasy saviors? All of us even if we do not believe in Jesus instinctively know that we need a Savior. We need saving. We need saving from all kinds of things.

We need to be saved from our own shame. We need to be saved from sicknesses and diseases. We need to be saved from accidents and other dangers. We need to be saved from tornadoes and fires. We need to be saved from economic disasters and unemployment. We need to be saved from floods and droughts. The government might be able to save us from one or two of these things, but most of us believe that we have to be saved from the government also.

In the final analysis and in light of all of these things we need to be saved from death. None of the things that threaten us would matter if we did not die. A sickness does not matter if you know in advance that you will not die from it. An economic downturn does not matter if you know that you will not die. Unemployment does not matter if you know that you will not die. Natural threats are not a problem if you know that you will not die. The reason that we go to our basements during a tornado warning is because if we don't we may die. The reason that we do not drive in flooded areas is because people die. The reason that we worry about sicknesses that have killed other people is that they might kill us too. If we knew in advance that we would not die, then it would not be so bad. In fact I think that we knew that we would not die, we would never be impatient. The only reason that we get impatient is because we know that we only have so much time left and this guy or this situation is wasting it.

Therefore of all the things from which we need to be saved, death is the most prominent. Death is the one that overarches all of the others. If someone would save us from death, then none of these other things would matter. Or to put it another way, if someone saved us from death, then He will have saved us from all of these other things as well.

And so the Savior has come. He saves you from death. He saves you from death by saving you from the cause of death. He saves you from your sins. He saves you from your sins by being both Christ and Lord. And by doing so He is your savior from death.

And where is this Savior from death? Well, at the first Christmas He was in Bethlehem. He was a new born. If that is not enough information for you to use to identify Him among all of other children in Bethlehem then make sure that you look for the One who is swaddled and lying in a manger.

In the Name of Jesus. Merry Christmas.