

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Festival of the Nativity of our Lord – Christmas Day
December 25, 2025
Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz
The mystery of the incarnation

—Hebrews 1:1-9

Our celebration of Christmas has all the marks of a great story. There is the poor couple traveling a long distance, the expectant mother making a grueling and difficult journey. There is the unwelcome reception that leaves the family without a room in the inn, seeking shelter in a stable, probably in a cave where animals were kept. There is the onset of childbirth that results in a baby boy being born under these humble circumstances and laid in a manger—a feed trough for animals. There are the shepherds, who receive the good news from angels and come to worship the baby Jesus. The scene is beautiful, peaceful. The story is simple enough to be appreciated by little children and loved by people of all ages. Its enduring qualities have resonated down through the centuries.

But what we see barely scratches the surface. On this day, the little town of Bethlehem really is the center of the universe. This event, this humble birth in lowly circumstances is the climax of the ages. The woman who gives birth is a virgin; she has never known a man. The child she bears has been conceived in her by God himself by the power of the Holy Spirit. It's the fulfillment of millennia of prophecy, the pinnacle of everything human beings have been waiting for, as they clung to the promises and the prophecies of old. Now the infinite and eternal God has entered space and time. *In the past, God spoke to our forefathers by the prophets at many times and in many ways. In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.*

Christmas is so beautifully simple, yet the mystery of the incarnation is so sublimely deep—profound beyond our comprehension. This tiny baby is the Son of God. The Evangelist John tells us, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the only-begotten, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Who is this Word? John tells us that, as well: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made. Without him was nothing made that has been made” (John 1:1-3). The Word is the Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, eternally begotten of the Father, who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven, was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. He is appointed by the Father to be *heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.*

Did you know that scientists have known about other galaxies for only about a hundred years? The closest galaxy to us, called Andromeda or M31, is visible in a dark sky with the naked eye. You can look for it tonight, if you want to; it looks like a bright smudge. People used to call it the Andromeda Nebula (*nebula* is the Latin word for cloud) because they thought it was a cloud of gases out in space. It wasn't until the 1920s that an astronomer named Edwin Hubble proved that Andromeda is a cluster of stars—millions of stars. And it wasn't until the 1990s, when the Hubble Telescope (named after Edwin) was able to see farther into space, that we discovered there are actually *billions* of galaxies, and each galaxy contains millions or billions of stars. The vast scope of the universe is incomprehensible! All of this, of course, has led to great speculation about how they all got there, the invention of the “Big Bang” Theory that it “just happened,” that everything came from a single point of nothingness that exploded into everything, the age of the universe being many billions of years old, and so on. Sadly, all these human theories leave out an all-powerful Creator.

Here's a fun thing about being a Christian: God actually tells us how the universe came into existence; we don't have to speculate or theorize. God was there, and he tells us what he did. In Genesis Scripture tells us that on the fourth day of creation, God said, “Let there be . . .” and the sun, moon and stars all came into existence at God's command. In fact, the creation of all those billions of galaxies is summed up this way: “He also made the stars” (Genesis 1:16). God is the one who created all things, seen and unseen. He is the omnipotent Maker, who sets the stars in space and arranges the galaxies at his pleasure like Lego blocks. From the vastness of the universe to the intricacies of the atoms and molecules and the DNA that make up your body and every living thing—God made it all. God formed it all. God knows it all.

Some would-be Christians try to make the Bible fit into modern human thinking. “Maybe God created the universe,” they say, “but he took billions of years to do it.” To that we say, “Your god is so, so small.” Let me introduce you to the God who *is* God, the God who reveals himself to us in Holy Scripture, the God who speaks and calls the universe into existence. And not only that, but God still sustains and preserves the universe. If the created universe is vast and incomprehensible, how much more is Almighty God, its Maker? He called it all into existence by his Word.

About 2,000 years ago God entered his creation and interacted with his creation in a way that is truly beyond our ability to grasp: the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. He was born in Bethlehem to a virgin mother. These are lofty claims that Holy Scripture makes about Jesus Christ. He's not just a great teacher, a noble martyr for a

great cause, a nice guy, who is the subject of Sunday school stories. He is Almighty God in the flesh, the One through whom the universe was made. "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see! Hail, the incarnate Deity!" But Scripture doesn't just throw these claims out there; the Bible substantiates them and says, "Examine the facts." Jesus has power at his fingertips that no mere human being can command. He changes water into wine. He commands wind and wave to be still. He multiplies loaves and fishes and feeds thousands. He opens the eyes of the blind. He speaks to a dead person, and the corpse is filled with life and sits up. And finally, on the third day after his death, he calls breath back into his own body, and he rises from the dead.

Jesus does it for one reason: For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. He comes to Earth because God our almighty Creator is Love. He doesn't just love, he doesn't just have love or feel love. Love is who he *is*. Love is God's essence. And Love personified, love wrapped in human flesh, is Jesus Christ.

Jesus came to provide purification for sin. Your sin, my sin, our rude rebellion against our Maker, our willful disobedience to his eternal will, our utter lack of love. To provide purification for our sin, he had to do something that was completely foreign to him. He became our sin. He took your sin and my sin upon himself. He was wrapped in our guilt, as he offered his innocence to God the Father as payment for our sin. This was the only way justice could be satisfied: Our righteous substitute becomes our sin, so that we can become his righteousness. Jesus plunged himself from the galactic heights of eternal glory into the depths and degradation of utter humiliation—even death on a cross, so that he could raise you to the heights of ultimate glory. Jesus came from the heights of heaven above to make this world his temporary home, so that he could take us to be with him in his eternal home.

Join me today, as we kneel at the manger and wonder and marvel at the firstborn of God, whom celestial beings worship in the Christmas sky. This tiny baby, whose birth we celebrate, is the King of heavens, the Ruler of creation, the Judge of the living and the dead. Leave your sin, repent of it, turn away from it, and turn to Christ, who brings forgiveness and healing. You are created in the image of Christ to love righteousness and to hate wickedness. Stand before the Lord's table today and receive Jesus, receive his body and blood—once conceived and born as your brother, once laid in a manger, once nailed to a cross, once raised from the dead, and now forever given to you, as Christ gives to you himself in the Sacrament. Receive his body and blood given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins, for peace, for healing, for a taste of paradise that waits. Marvel and wonder, for Christ was born for you. Christ has come for you—with redemption, with healing, with forgiveness, and with eternal life.

This is the mystery of the incarnation. Amen.