

Luke 1:31-33 ³¹ You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

His Exquisite Birth

The newlywed couple Mary and Joseph; the hard but touching journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem; the dank setting of a cattle shed; the crude manger in which the newborn Child was placed; shepherds, awed by the sight of an angel; the melody of a myriad of angels—all these components of the true Christmas story add up to what we might call “His Exquisite Birth.” We can never find another birth like it.

The Advent hymn, “Savior of the Nations, Come” fine-tunes our focus for this fourth and final Sunday in Advent. Originally penned in Latin dating back to the fourth century, Luther brought it forward to German, and now it finds our voices and ears in English.

“Marvel now, O heav’n and earth, That the Lord chose such a birth” (CW 2:1). The hymn is right. There are a host of exquisite features that move us to talk about his exquisite birth.

Of course, every birth of a child is wondrous in its way. Just about every adult has had the pleasure of holding a newborn. What an added sense of awe, many of you have felt when that is your own child, born of our flesh and blood.

We rightly speak about “the miracle of birth”: tiny hands and fingernails; lips and eyes of lovely form, miniature arms and legs gently flexing themselves as God knits the child together. Who can resist these inspiring features? We affirm God’s sacred gift of life in the womb and life freshly come. It’s a child, not a choice. Life matters. Life counts. Life is exquisite.

Birth and life are exquisite. Maybe that's why we feel especially shaken by a terrible phenomenon: the untimely death of babies and small children. When we hear about such atrocities, we in the community of faith must do more than wring our hands or feel sorry. We must hear again the word of Jesus about becoming peacemakers. In an active way we have to offer children a more life-affirming reason to live. Life is wondrously sacred, and we need to instill this value in children in vital ways that make a difference for them. We need to remind ourselves how precious life is and it's not about the quality or convenience but the gift of God's grace (God's present of time to come and to grow in faith) interwoven into God's double helix of the DNA of the blessing of life.

But when we talk about the Child born of Mary, the Bible reminds us that despite the humble, earthly scene, there is a singular feature essential to his exquisite birth: Jesus was born of a virgin mother. **The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you** is the way the angel Gabriel explained it to Mary (Lk 1:35).

Here we come upon the supremely exquisite quality of the infant Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit of God who empowered the conception of this child.

What does this fact mean for us? What is so exquisite about this feature in the story of Jesus' birth? According to the angel, the conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit is a sign of his divinity. The virgin birth is the indisputable fact that shows Jesus is the Son of God. He is the one who saves. He is God with us.

Jesus is the eternal Son of God—he always has been and always will be. In the Nicene Creed we affirm that he was “begotten, not made, of one being with God the Father.” This means that the virgin conception of Jesus did not “make” him the Son of God, as if he were not before. What happened at his miraculous conception? St. John summarizes the Gospel of Christmas by saying “the Word became flesh” (1:14). The eternal Word of God, who is forever the Son of God, came to us in human flesh as the baby of Bethlehem. The Word became incarnate, became “in flesh.”

Did not this virgin conception—this exquisite birth—serve as a marvelous signal for all time that God was acting in a unique way in the coming of Jesus? Look at this virgin-conceived child! He is the only one the world will ever see. Behold the virgin-born Son of God—Yes! For in his coming, and in all of his life upon earth that follows, God was moving into action in an ultimate way to bring his rescuing and saving power to us creatures of flesh. God became one of us (but without sin) in order to redeem each of us.

Jesus' exquisite birth pushes us onward to behold his exquisite ministry as well, and then to behold his most exquisite death and resurrection. This Jesus comes as Savior, and in his coming God is acting with finality to save us from our sins.

Today we approach the completion of the blessed Advent season; you and I must catch the profound significance of the exquisite signal God displayed to all humanity. As we review the biblical teaching about the virgin conception, it proclaims that the Son of God has come as the Father's final Word of love to you and me. In his birth, cross, and resurrection, God's love for you and me is expressed fully and completely; God's plan of salvation is fulfilled. God requires nothing more. And mankind, including ourselves, can contribute nothing to God's exquisite gift.

That is good news; it is exquisite news! It is news that we need to thrust outward until all people know of it and believe it. You and I must move beyond simply observing God's signal to the point where we are dynamically witnessing about it. That is part of the Advent call. Christ the exquisite-born is Savior of the nations. In the hymn we pray that this Savior of the nations comes to each of us. But we are also challenged in this season to see to it that the message of His love and deliverance comes to people everywhere—to the nations.

God's message of the child born to Mary moves faith. In her pre-Christmas song, Mary sang about a similar vision. "All generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48), she proclaimed. The Savior's conception in her womb was an exquisite event because it was the Savior so conceived. The Savior who escaped the power of sin and defeated it daily in life. "All generation" and "all nations" need to know of the salvation finally wrought by this Child as he died upon the cross and rose in glorious new life on Easter.

Many walk away from Christmas and will say the best part is the singing, the smiles you bring to faces, the time spent with family, etc. They reflect that it was a "great feeling" to celebrate and they are excited to tell what they did and what they got. Soon you and I will celebrate too. We will go to Bethlehem here at our own altar. After hearing the good news of the Savior's exquisite birth, I hope we'll exclaim, "I can't wait until all my friends hear about it so that their hearts sing with the peace of forgiveness, that their faces smile wide with the joy of the Savior, and they marvel at the time they get to spend with our brother, Jesus, at his exquisite birth"