

LUKE 2:10–12. (EHV)

The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. For behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all people: Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

“He is Christ the Lord...a baby.” If you already took a peek at the Martin Luther sermon excerpt in the back of the bulletin, you know that one of the drums he liked to beat was that God taking on human flesh was the greatest honor ever bestowed upon the human race.

What does it mean to have honor? It means that you occupy an esteemed and advantageous position. You have helpful and powerful connections, and others also benefit from being connected to you. You are highly respected and thus more likely to be viewed in a favorable light and to have your faults overlooked or easily forgotten.

So how has God bestowed the greatest honor upon the human race by becoming human?

First, just that fact that God became a human gives us tremendous honor. Imagine if our country were ruled by an absolute monarch, and he visited one city in the United States for a week every year. During that week he talked with city leadership, business owners, doctors, teachers, and church leaders. He ate in the local restaurants, shopped in the local stores, and attended community events, giving him a chance also to talk with ordinary citizens. Which cities would you expect that monarch to visit? Big ones, right? Boston, Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, Seattle, Dallas—those kinds of cities, cities that begin to approach the glory of an absolute monarch, cities that offer accommodations and amenities worthy of him. But imagine if he actually chose to visit Winner one year. What an honor that would be, because of how great and powerful the monarch is, and because of how relatively small, remote, and insignificant Winner is.

God is God. Solomon said the heavens cannot contain him, even the highest heavens. The psalms say that the earth and everything and everyone in it belong to him. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. The apostle Paul says he alone is immortal and lives in unapproachable light. Thousands upon thousands attend him; ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. For him to take on the nature of any of his creatures is unthinkable, but he took on ours!

But it’s even more astounding than that. He didn’t take on the nature of an angel or an animal or a star. He took on the nature of the race he created that rebelled against him. Yes, some of the angels rebelled against him too, but some remained loyal, whereas all humans rebelled against God when Adam and Eve rebelled against him. So Christ taking on human flesh isn’t just like if we had an absolute monarch who visited a city like Winner, but it’s like if he spent all his time during his visit in the jail, visiting the people who had violated his laws.

But the honor goes even further. For Christ did not take on human flesh simply as an experiment. He wasn’t like the princes or princesses in the stories who disguise themselves as commoners to see what regular life is like and to see how people talk about them when they don’t know the prince or princess is listening. “Today in the town of David, a *Savior* was born for you.” Christ took on humanity in order to save humanity. He was born under God’s law in

order to obey God's law in our place. He took on mortal flesh in order to pay the ultimate penalty for our sins. He would one day exchange the wood of the manger for the wood of the cross. His righteousness would count as our righteousness. His payment as our payment. His victory as our victory. His life as our life.

Birthdays are a strange thing, when you stop to think about it, aren't they? We celebrate them, even though they represent another loud tick on the clock counting down to our death. "Happy birthday! You're one year closer to the grave!" From the moment we are born, we begin to die, because of our natural slavery to sin, death, and the devil.

But not so in Christ. In Christ, from the moment he is born, we begin to live. He is here to give us righteousness in place of sin, life in place of death, heaven in place of the devil and hell. His birthday, and everything that followed it, is what makes our birthdays worth celebrating. For all those who believe in him, their birthday is not just another tick closer to death, but also another step closer to eternal life in heaven.

"I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all people: Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord." What an honor! In Christ, you occupy an esteemed and advantageous position. You have the most helpful and powerful connection, and others also benefit from being connected to you. God himself views you in a favorable light and overlooks and forgets all your faults, because his Son has paid for all of them. What an honor for the human race, collectively and individually! It is, in fact, the greatest honor that has ever befallen us. Don't decline this high honor, dismiss it with a wave of your hand, or shrug at it with indifference. Receive this free gift, this greatest gift, in faith and joy.