



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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December 31, 2006
1st Sunday after Christmas
Hebrews 2:10-18
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: 1 Samuel 2:18-20,26
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 111
Second Lesson: Hebrews 2:10-18
Gospel: Luke 2:41-52

Welcome Your Brother

So how did all of your family gatherings go over the holiday? Did everything go as you hoped? Were you blessed by the Lord with good times together, seeing relatives that maybe you haven't seen in awhile? Or, sometimes as the case is with family get togethers, was there stress or strain? Or did you see family members that are going through sickness and difficulty that it hurts to see?

There are a lot of different family groups in this room, even though most of you are interrelated it seems, but there are a lot of different family groups that get together and there are a lot of different stories with each and every one of them. There are a lot of different joys and a lot of different sorrows.

Families come in all different shapes and sizes, don't they? They come in all different kinds of make ups—blended families, step brothers and sisters, half brothers and sisters, adopted brothers and sisters. But then again, that it nothing new, is it? A family coming in all different shapes and sizes and being blended together is something you and I have been a part of since the moment God brought you and me to faith. Since the moment God brought you to believe that Jesus is your Lord and Savior and he took away your sins, he brought you into his family—not a family that you belong to by nature. By nature, you belong to the family of Adam—the fallen family, the family that is separated and distant from God. But by God's grace, Jesus is not ashamed to call you his brother. What a wonderful truth that is to know that we belong to the greatest family of all.

So as we gather together as the Christmas season now is drawing to a close—next weekend we have the Festival of Epiphany on the 6th—we gather together and one more time we say, "Welcome little brother" to the Christ child. Our God reminds us through these words to the Hebrews that Christ is our brother. He became one of us. He was not ashamed to call us his brothers. This morning we rejoice to welcome our brother. He is our brother because he was born like us. He was born flesh and blood. He left heaven and became like us for some incredible things. We welcome our little brother because we know why he was born. He was born to make atonement for our sins. It sounds like a big, long, fancy word, but it is a beautiful word that we will take a look at a little bit later.

Think of this incredible truth—God left heaven and became just like you and me. Think about that. Think about this fact that he left his full glory and divine power behind. He set aside its full and constant use. Sure he used it from time to time with his miracles

and revealed it in glimpses here and there, but he set it aside willingly and lovingly to become one of us with our frailties and with our weaknesses. Think about it—God slept. God ate. God drank. God got tired. God got weary. God cried when his friend Lazarus died. God did all of those things because he was not only God, he had also become human. What an incredible truth that is.

We are told *Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises"* (Hebrews 2:11,12)—a Psalm that is attributed then to the Messiah speaking by the author of the letter to the Hebrews. He calls us brothers because he shared in our humanity. He became one of us. He was born in humble circumstances, but the fact is that he was born. He was born and went through the things that we go through. He went through, as we heard this morning, having parents that worry about him. That is something that never changes. Parents worry about their children no matter what age they are and no matter what they are going through. Jesus was the object of that worry for Mary and Joseph. He went through having to grow up and be a teenager. He went through all the things and the challenges that teenagers would face. He went through everything that we go through and because he suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted—you and me—because what we go through, he went through.

He didn't have to do it. He could have stayed in heaven. He didn't have to become flesh and blood. He didn't have to go through all those things. It wasn't enjoyable for him to go through all those things, but he did it. He became one of us. So we rejoice to celebrate Christmas because we are rejoicing that God became flesh because he loved you and he loved me that much. He became like us in every way, except one of course, he was without sin.

You and I make our parents worry at times because we are sinful and because we do things that cause them hurt or concern or anxiety. You and I suffer when we are tempted, not just because we are being tempted, but because all too often you and I give in to the temptation. You and I give in to what the devil puts in front of us as the better way or the more enjoyable path. You and I run down it, not just walk down it, not just tiptoe down it from time to time. You and I run down it and embrace it at times because we are sinful human beings, children of Adam, and we suffer because we bring it upon ourselves at times.

He went through everything. We are told he was born and became like us, not because it was a vacation, not because it was a time away from heaven, but so that he might help us so that he might by his death *destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death* (Hebrews 2:14,15). Because you and I know we are sinners, it brings fear into our lives because we know that the wages of sin is death—not just physical death but eternal death and an eternity being separated from God in hell. That is what makes us afraid of physical death, because it is such an unknown and deep rooted in our conscience, God lets us know that death is a reminder that there is sin in the world. It is no longer the perfect world that he had created. But Christ came into this world to make atonement

for us to free us from our slavery to the fear of death. He came into this world to destroy him who holds the power of death. How he does that is he makes atonement for us. He is a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God who makes atonement for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:16).

Our sins separate us from God. Our sins don't just cause us to suffer, they don't just cause us problems in the here and now, and our sins cause us problems in the forever, in the hereafter. At least they should. But God acted. He became flesh. He became one of us so that he could be our substitute because God demands that you and I be perfect. We aren't going to be perfect. We can't become perfect. We can't do that ourselves because we are born sinful and then we commit sins. But Jesus was perfect in our place. He fulfilled the law perfectly in our place. He obeyed his parents perfectly in our place. He served the Lord faithfully in our place. All the areas where we have fallen flat on our face in the deep muck of sin, Jesus walked above it. He was perfect in order to make atonement for us.

Then, because you and I are sinners, and because God has said the wages of sin is death, Jesus died in our place so that by his death he might destroy the devil. Now when the devil accuses you and me and we stand in faith believing that Jesus lived and died in our place, the devil's accusations fall off of us faster than an egg off a Teflon pan. They just slide right away because when God looks at us, he doesn't see our sin. He sees Jesus' perfection because Jesus has made us at one with God. That is what the word "atonement" means. God demands that you and I be at one with him and that we be perfect and holy, so Jesus was holy in our place.

Then Jesus clothes us with that holiness at our baptism and as we remain in faith, that clothing remains—never getting dirty, never needing to be washed, clothing us continually in his perfection so that when we sin, we say, "Lord forgive me," and Christ's perfection covers us. The death that he died pays for our sins so that we are not separated from him. We are now at one with him. That is what atonement means. The sacrifice of atonement—"at one ment"—we are now at one with God.

Christmas came so that you and I would be at one with God, and you and I need that because we are not at one with God, but because he has made us his brothers, because he took on our flesh, because he has made us his children through the gift of faith, we are now at one with God and we can welcome our brother—not in fear, not in trembling. We can welcome him with rejoicing. We can welcome him with song. We can welcome him with confidence because we are holy in his sight.

Maybe we didn't get the gift we wanted and maybe we pouted about it and maybe we sinned against God in how we treated our relatives or how our relatives treated us over the holidays, but in Christ, that is all washed away. In Christ, we stand forgiven. That is why we welcome him as our redeeming brother.