

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“Jesus, Lord, at Thy Birth”

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“And the angel said to the shepherds, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who 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’” (Luke 2:10-12).

“Jesus, Lord, at Thy Birth”. That’s the miracle of Christmas, isn’t it? That’s what boggles our brains if we think about it. How is it that the creator of heaven and earth has become so small, so frail and vulnerable? How is it that the One whose voice would cause the gates of hell to quake is now himself quivering in a manger? How is it that God, who is Spirit and eternal should now be clothed in our poor flesh and bone?

I picture him there in the manger, sleeping the sleep of a new born, all tuckered out from the birthing. Mary, also exhausted, picks at the bits of hay lodged into the cloth that swaddles him, and treasures these things up in her heart. Joseph so ashamed, so apologetic over not providing better for his new wife. A donkey sniffs at the baby. Joseph shoves it aside, perhaps a little more rigorously than necessary.

Is it really true? Is it really the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay?

The Angels who announced his birth seem to think so. “Unto you is born this day a Savior who is Christ the Lord.” Christ the Lord. About thirty years later, at his Baptism, that thunderous voice from heaven confirms the message of the angels. “Behold, this is my Son. Listen to him!” Mysteriously, the demons seem to know who he is even before his disciples. “What do you want with us, Son of God? Have you come to destroy us?” (Mt. 8:29). Peter was one of the first ones to get it right. “What about you” Jesus asked. “Who do you say that I am.” “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!” Jesus often corrected Peter but he did not correct Peter on that one. “Blessed are you, Simon. Flesh and blood didn’t reveal this to you but my Father in heaven.” And remember after the resurrection how Thomas still had his doubts? “Put your finger here” Jesus said. “See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Remember what Thomas said? “My Lord and my God!” Again, Jesus did not correct him. He let that confession stand.

So we have a little infant in a manger, and Scripture calls him the Lord Jesus Christ. The early church did as well. The very first confession of faith by the earliest Christians consisted of just three words: “Jesus is Lord”. This was before the Athanasian creed of the 6th century. This was before the Nicene Creed of the year 325 AD. This was even before the Apostles’ Creed. Before any of those there was only this three word creed: “Jesus is Lord.” Those who listened to him teach came to the conclusion: “Jesus is Lord.” Those who witnessed his love for the unlovable, for the sinners, the poor, the marginalized: “Jesus is Lord.” Those who saw his miracles . . . over the forces of nature, and over the ravages of disease and over the demonic,

even over the dead: they could not explain it any other way. “Jesus must be Lord.” Those who saw him risen from the dead: “Jesus is Lord.”

That confession is tucked into one of the earliest symbols of the Christian faith, the fish that you see on bumper stickers and in the yellow pages and on business cards, identifying the person as a Christian. In the Greek a fish is an Ichthys, and the spelling of Ichthys forms an acronym for the confession of faith: Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior. During the fierce persecution from the Roman Empire, Christians used the fish symbol to mark meeting places and tombs and even to tell friend from foe. A Christian would sometimes draw an arc in the soil with a walking stick, and if another completed the fish by drawing the other arc, he knew he was in good and safe company.

“Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior.” That’s the claim that is being made all over the world this day. No one really denies the humanity of Jesus any more. With all the evidence, to deny his humanity would put you squarely in the camp of those who still insist man never landed on the moon. Few, therefore, deny his humanity. Many, however, deny his divinity. They cannot bring themselves to confess Jesus is Lord. They’ll sing his praises up and down, but will always stop short of confessing him as Lord. “Jesus was a great religious teacher” they say, “an extraordinary human being”, “a prophet with charisma.” They go on and on and on, always falling short of faith. C.S. Lewis addressed them in his book *Mere Christianity*: Anyone who said some of the things Jesus said “would either be a lunatic, on a level with a man who says he is a poached egg, or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make the choice. Either [Jesus is Lord]; or else a madman or something worse . . . but let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that [option] open to us.” He is either Lord, lunatic or liar.

Around here, we confess “Jesus is Lord.” It’s the simplest of creeds, but also the most impossible, for Paul writes “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ but by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). No one can believe it unless the Holy Spirit is working on him through his Word.

It’s a creed that is tucked into many of the carols we sing.

-From “Silent Night, Holy Night”: “Jesus, **Lord** at Thy Birth”.

-Oh, Come, let us adore him, Christ the **Lord!**”

- “Joy to the World, The **Lord** is come.”

- And from “Away in the manger” “. . . “ The little **Lord** Jesus asleep on the hay.”

“The little Lord Jesus” . . . We sing it so nonchalantly; those words roll off the tongue so easily. But have you thought through the implications? “Jesus is Lord” means that neither anyone else nor anything else can claim more of your loyalty or your love than him. When Jesus is Lord, he is superior to the claims of your own family. We read over and over again in the Bible that family is important, clan is good . . . *but Jesus is Lord*. Therefore when the two (family and Lord) are not in synch, when family expects one thing of you and Jesus quite another, whose going to win that tug of war? Jesus is Lord.

When Jesus is Lord, he is superior to the claims of the nation and state. Again, Scripture acknowledges government is good. God uses it to care for and protect us so we might flourish and live peaceable lives. Those who have experienced anarchy know that government is good. Paul writes, “He who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted” (Rom. 13:2). However, there is a caveat. When the government demands one thing and God through

his Word another, who's going to win your allegiance? Acts 5:29 says "We must obey God rather than man." Why? "Jesus is Lord."

When Jesus is Lord, he trumps any loyalties our friends have on us, or our professors, or the boss. When Jesus is Lord, he has greater claim over you than your race, or economic status, or orientation. When Jesus is Lord, there are no other gods or idols. If Jesus is Lord, your manager is not, nor your lover, nor your child. When Jesus is Lord, he is Lord over your time, your money, your dreams and desires.

When Jesus is Lord, he owns you, lock, stock and barrow. People say, "I can do whatever I want with my own body." But that doesn't hold water anymore, because Jesus is Lord, also over your body. "It's okay, so long as it's between two consensual adults." That doesn't work anymore either, because Jesus is Lord. "The laws of the Bible don't really apply to us because they are ancient and this is 2012" . . . that one leaks like a sieve because Jesus is still Lord. The Lord has established the rules for us; we don't get to make up our own.

The Good News is when Jesus is Lord, he is Lord over your sin. This little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay . . . he came to take up your sin as his own and die for it on a cross. He died for the sins of the *world*. We can't do that. He can, because "Jesus is Lord."

When Jesus is Lord, not even death can keep its hold on him. Death has no power over him. So three days later Jesus lives again because "Jesus is Lord."

When Jesus is Lord, Satan is not. His tyranny is done. He's all beat up; one little word can fell him.

When Jesus is Lord, water can wash us clean not just of dirt and grime, but now also of sin. When Jesus is Lord, water also marks our children as God's children, to our great joy and their great welfare. Ordinary water cannot do that. But when the Lord is working with it, all things are possible.

When Jesus is Lord, bread and wine carry the impossible freight of his body and blood for our forgiveness because his word demands it to do so. It has no other choice.

When Jesus is Lord, you can give him your sin, your guilt, and he'll take it. He'll take it all. None of it is too heavy or too messy or too wicked for him because Jesus is Lord. And because Jesus is Lord, in exchange for your sin he'll give his righteousness, innocence and blessedness.

When Jesus is Lord, there is no force so powerful, no addiction so strong that you cannot overcome it.

When Jesus is Lord, his church stands, even in places where it is fiercely persecuted. If the devil cannot overcome God's church, then the little tyrants and autocrats of the world have no chance of snuffing it out either.

Jesus is Lord. Those three words make it possible for Christians to stand up against overwhelming powers and superior forces, because they know the one whom they serve is superior to the ones who would destroy them. I'm thinking of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as he was about to be executed in the waning days of WWII; he was superior to the might of Adolf Hitler because he knew Jesus is Lord. I'm thinking of that Iranian pastor today, Youcef Nardarkhani, who is facing execution for refusing to renounce his faith. He is superior to the might of the mulahs and the Supreme Ayatolah and the fatwas and jihads because he knows Jesus is Lord.

And one day when you are on your death bed, you will be superior even to the forces of death because Jesus is stronger than the tyranny of time and the dominion of death.

Jesus is Lord. The magi knew it. It was made known to them. That's why they got on bended knee and worshipped him. You know it too. Presumably, that's why you're here. And one day all will know it. On That Day, at the name of Jesus *every* knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and *every* tongue confess that Christ is Lord.

Jesus is Lord. Sleeping in the manger, dying on the cross, rising at the resurrection. Jesus is Lord. In his Word, his Baptism, his Supper. Jesus is Lord in your life and at your death. Jesus is Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen