**Hebrews 1:1-4,8 (1-9) (2nd of 3 devotions)** December 25, 2022

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Christmas Day

*[I suggest this reading be read at the end of the devotion.]*

**But Why This Joy?**

But should we burst into joy over this child? You know what infant mortality was like in the ancient world? About half of children did not reach their teenage years. Isn’t it a little premature getting excited at just this point? There are a lot of what-ifs and maybes between birth and adulthood for the child of Mary.

And it’s not just the survival rate that should give us pause. Ninety-nine percent of us grow up to be fairly ordinary people. That’s not a bad thing! But this child doesn’t seem to be on the road to the exceptional life Isaiah had prophesied. Jesus maybe was not the only child born in Bethlehem that night, but he surely was the only one placed in a livestock feeding trough. That’s not a great start. And he and his parents would be refugees of a sort for the first few years before finally making their way back to their home town. In real time people would look on that newborn baby and say to Mary and Joseph, “What a blessing!” But if we are realistic, as the shepherds burst in and then out into the streets, the casual observer would surely think, “Don’t you think you guys are getting a little ahead of yourselves!”

That happens when we watch only with the eyes of this world, unspiritual eyes.

People still look at the Bethlehem manger through an unspiritual filter. It has become much less common very recently, but in the early 2000’s and before, celebrities and entertainers would regularly put on Christmas specials or produce Christmas albums. The shows would often at least give a nod to the baby Jesus and Bethlehem. The singers’ albums usually included at least a couple *Christian* Christmas songs. And yet if you listened with sensitive Christian ears, while you would hear them talk about the baby, the manger, hope and peace, you would hear them carefully dance around subjects of sin and death, heaven and hell when it comes to Christmas. As an example, take one of my favorite movies of all, *It’s a Wonderful Life*. Lots about angels and God, but I would contend that if it doen’t mention Jesus (and it doesn’t) it’s a holiday story, not a Christmas story.

Living in the real world, rubbing shoulders with real people, does that viewpoint rub off; does a little of Christ get rubbed out of Christmas?

This reading was written to Christians living in the real world. They were tempted to downplay, who Christ really is. We don’t have time to get into their situation, but there were hard pressures to turn their attentions elsewhere, like to the spirit world and angels.

And so Hebrews chapter one makes clear just whom we are paying attention to on Christmas. He is the one who ***“made the universe.”*** He is the one who ***“sustains all things by his powerful word.”*** Quoting from the Old Testament, kind of like judges quote court precedents, the writer says, ***“About the Son God says [in the Psalms],”***—about the Son!—***“‘Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever.’”*** If the Christchild is that great, then why a human baby in a manger? That was all about—and I repeat—that whole coming in the flesh thing is all about ***“providing purification for sins,”*** verse 3. All the other stuff that people like to talk about, peace, hope, goodwill to men, those are good things, but they completely depend on ***“providing purification for sins.”*** You can’t have those other things if you don’t have ***“purification for sins.”*** “Oh, but we can’t talk about that!” Well, then you’re not talking about Christmas!

Can something that great be embodied in this little baby born in Bethlehem? Survival rate: 50% Chance of succeeding when born in a stable: <1%. Savior of the world? How can he without army or money or the establishment on his side?

Listen to God’s Word talk about that child: *[Read the text, then sing Hymn 350, Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.]*

*Hebrews 1:1In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2but 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. 3The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. 4So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs…*

*8But about the Son [God] says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom.”*