

# Christmas Day 2024

## "To Know the Answer, First Know the Question"

*Text: 1 Samuel 8:4-9*

*Come, O long-expected Jesus, born to set Your people free;  
From our sins and fears release us, by Your death on Calvary.*

*Born Your people to deliver, born a child and yet a king,  
Born to reign in us forever, now your gracious kingdom bring.*

*By Your own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;  
By Your all sufficient merit, raise us to Your glorious throne. (WS 705)*

May the undeserved love of God, demonstrated so beautifully in the manger in Bethlehem, be forever grafted into your heart; and may you know the peace that comes only through faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior, your Lord, your King. Amen

Dear Fellow Servants of the Baby King:

I love the description of the Old Testament as one giant Advent Calendar. Every day you can go there, open a little window, and find some picture or bit of information about the coming of the Promised Messiah. The entire Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi, is all about Jesus. It is certainly not inappropriate therefore that our text for this Christmas morning is found in the Old Testament – the 1<sup>st</sup> Book of Samuel, the 8<sup>th</sup> Chapter:

***ESV(1 Samuel 8:4-9) Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah <sup>5</sup> and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations." <sup>6</sup> But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. <sup>7</sup> And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. <sup>8</sup> According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. <sup>9</sup> Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."***

This is God's Word. On this Christmas Day we celebrate the giving of gifts, in particular the gift of the Baby King. Yet we are also reminded that God's

Word is the single greatest gift given by God to mankind since the birth of our Savior. As we struggle to value God's great gifts appropriately, and to benefit from them fully, so we pray, "***Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!***" Amen.

They say there is no such thing as a dumb question. Having taught Confirmation Classes for almost 40 years, I can say with absolute certainty that that is not true. I've noticed that there are also truisms floating about that fail the truth test at least as often as they succeed. "Early to bed and early to rise," for example, guarantees neither health, nor wealth, nor wisdom. There is another that I would like to be true but has definite limitations: "Jesus is the Answer!" Maybe you've seen the signs and bumper stickers. The thought that invariably pops into my head is: "What's the Question?" Don't misunderstand. Jesus is the answer, the *only* answer, to life's most important question. The point is that answers are robbed of their relevance and importance if they are not preceded by questions. "Stab her in the stomach" is a great answer, but only if you know that the question is "In an emergency, how do save the life of a badly bloated cow?" "Let most of the air out of the tires" is a great answer, but only if you know that the question is "How am I going to get this semi, which is 2" too tall, under that bridge?"

Answers tend to be robbed of their meaning and importance if we don't know the questions. That's where the Old Testament comes in. The Old Testament is where we get the questions. The New Testament is where we get the answers.

One common question, especially among new Christians who want to get into or learn about the Bible, is "Where should I start reading?" The answer depends on the individual, but the most common suggestion is to start with the Gospels in the New Testament, or maybe one of Paul's Epistles. The greatest drawback with that approach is that you tend to find the answer before you really know the question.

Life's key question begin to form already in the Book of Genesis. The fall into sin *enslaved* not just Adam and Eve, but all of mankind that would follow. Fallen mankind was powerless to free itself from its slavery to sin and Satan. We needed an "outsourced" rescue that we ourselves could never provide. The greatest question for all of humanity is therefore: "Who will rescue us?"

Much of what follows in the Old Testament tells of mankind's struggle to find the answer to this most basic, critical question. God allowed the Children of Israel to suffer 400 years of slavery in Egypt as one great big, long object lesson as to the futility of trying to free themselves from their far greater slavery. God himself then freed them – yet another object lesson. *"You can't free yourselves, but I can free you. The answer to your question ("Who will rescue us?") is Me. I'm the One that will deliver you."*

The Jews were never quite satisfied with this answer for very long. Even when they came to understand the need for rescue, they would turn from God and seek their own answers, their own solutions – often because they forgot that the basic question is not *"How will we rescue ourselves?"* but *"Who will rescue us?"* Anarchy, debauchery, and misery would follow. God for a time provided judges like Samson and Gideon to deliver them, temporarily easing their misery. It was a time when everyone tried to rescue themselves, when, as we read in the Book of Judges, ***"there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."***<sup>ESV</sup>(Judges 17:6)

This is the history that led up to the events described in our text. Still looking for the answer to the great question (*"Who will rescue us?"*) Israel came to the conclusion that the answer was to get a king. *"A king will deliver us! We want a king, just like all the other nations get to have."* (Sounds oddly familiar, doesn't it? *"Let's try what has always failed everywhere else, because we think it will work here."*) The reality was Israel wasn't so much trying to get a king as they were trying to get rid of the King they already had. From our text: ***And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them."***

What bitter irony. They already possessed the answer to their question, the solution to their problem. God was their King, and he was the one, the *only* one, who could and would rescue them. They opted for a different path, a different answer. They wanted an earthly king.

Ever notice how stubborn, sin-blinded men occasionally blurt out divine truth, though that truth is not at all what they intended? The terrified Jews begged for a mediator at Mt. Sinai. God's reply: *"Will do, but it won't be what you think."* We have God's own New Testament answer in 1 Timothy 2:5-6: ***For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who gave himself as a ransom for all.*** The godless high priest Caiaphas tried to style cold-blooded murder as virtuous wisdom when he said, ***"It is better for you that one man***

***should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish."*** Absolutely true, but not the way he meant it. So also here. The people asked for a king not in heaven but on earth. God's response: *"The King is coming, but it's not what you think."* Their earthly kings all turned out to be clay vessels that failed to bring true deliverance. Even the great King David failed in particularly spectacular fashion, and his son Solomon was pulled into spiritual chaos by his many pagan wives and concubines. It wasn't that God failed to warn them. Again from our text: ***"Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."***

None of this changed the fact that the people did, in fact, need a king – a king that would walk among them on this earth. A king that would serve as their mediator. A king that would faithfully serve them, fight for them, and finally deliver them.

With this background, hear again the message of the angel to Mary: ***And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."***<sup>ESV</sup>(Luke 1:30-33)

Mankind absolutely needed a King, which is exactly what God sent at Christmas. Yet he was nothing like what the Jews had come to expect. In fact, when he failed to live up to their expectations, when he gave them what they *needed* instead of what they *wanted*, or what they *thought* they needed, they first disowned him and then they murdered him. You recall their words at Jesus' trial: ***Pilate said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" <sup>15</sup> They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."***<sup>ESV</sup>(John 19:14-15)

The King sent from heaven to walk among us for a time was nothing at all like what mankind expected, and it is critically important that you and I see exactly who it was that lay in that manger. The Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul described him as ***"he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, <sup>16</sup> who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light... To***

**him be honor and eternal dominion.**<sup>ESV</sup>(1 Timothy 6:15-16) Again we read John's description in Revelation 19: ***Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. <sup>12</sup> His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. <sup>13</sup> He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. <sup>14</sup> And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. <sup>15</sup> From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. <sup>16</sup> On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.***

This is the Baby we see in the manger. This was, this *is*, the answer to the Old Testament question: *Who will rescue us?* The answer is Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Promised One, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. This is also why wonder should continue to fill our hearts and souls when we see that magnificent, all-powerful, all-knowing King of kings and Lord of lords wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger – a stable his first home. There we see, for time and for eternity, God's answer to man's most important question. There we learn not only that we were powerless to either find or provide our own rescue, our own release from our slavery to sin and Satan, there we see just *how powerless* we actually were. Look and see with the eyes of understanding just who it was that came, and thereby also then learn the enormity of your debt of sin and the great and terrible price that had to be paid for your ransom. The payment required was infinitely greater than the life of a human being. The only payment that could cover the incalculable cost of mankind's sin was the life of the very Son of God. This was a payment we could never have made, a release that on our own we could never have accomplished. *That* is why Jesus is the answer, the only answer, to mankind's great question: "*Who will rescue us?*" And *that* is why we celebrate the birth, life, and death of Jesus as we do. Amen.

**The Pre-Sermon Hymn -94** (Stanzas 1-3) (Brown Hymnal)  
"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

**The Sermon – Text:** 1 Samuel 8:4-9  
"To Know the Answer, First Know the Question"

**The Post-Sermon Hymn -92** (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)  
"Now Sing We, Now Rejoice"

**The Prayers followed by the Lord's Prayer**

**The Benediction**

**The Closing Hymn -91** (Stanzas 1-6 & 9) (Red Hymnal)  
"Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord"

**Silent Prayer**

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this Christmas morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!  
St. Paul Lutheran Church is a member congregation of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative synod with congregations throughout the United States and missions and affiliates around the world. If you are visiting from another city, please ask the pastor for the name of a CLC church near you.

**Announcements:**

**Christmas Flowers** – If you purchased one of the poinsettias with which the church has been decorated again this Christmas season, please feel free to take your plant(s) home with you after the service this morning, or consider gifting them to someone who might enjoy them.

**Schedule** – Since Pastor Roehl is scheduled to be out of town visiting family, Confirmation Class and Midweek Bible Study are not scheduled to resume until Wednesday, January 8<sup>th</sup>.



# St Paul Lutheran Church Bismarck, ND

## Christmas Day Service 2024



# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Mick Johnson, President      Angela Pfennig, Organist  
Michael Roehl, Pastor

**Christmas Day Service – December 25, 2024**

## Pre-Service Music

## The Opening Prayer and Invocation by the Pastor

**The Opening Hymn** -87 (*Stanza 1*) (*Red Hymnal*)  
"Joy to the World"

## Scripture Reading by the Pastor

(*Isaiah 9:2, 6-7*) The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined...<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

## The Response Sung by the Congregation – (Hymn 79)

Rejoice, rejoice this happy morn, a Savior unto us is born,  
The Christ the Lord of Glory.  
His lowly birth in Bethlehem the angels from on high proclaim  
And sing redemption's story.  
My soul, extol God's great favor, bless Him ever for salvation.  
Give Him praise and adoration.

## Call to Repentance by the Pastor

*On this great day we lift our hearts and voices in thanksgiving to our God. Yet our joy on this occasion is also mixed with sobriety, for we recognize that it was our sin that brought Jesus to earth, where He paid the penalty that we deserved. It is fitting and right therefore that we humbly confess our sins to our God on this morning when we celebrate the birth of the One who came to pay for those sins.*

## The Confession of Sins (*Sung to "Oh Come Oh Come Emmanuel"*)

1. Alas, my God, my sins are great, my conscience doth upbraid me;  
And now I find that in my strait, no man hath power to aid me.  
Forgive me Lord; turn not my soul away; for Jesus died to save me.

2. And fled I hence in my despair, in some lone spot to hide me,  
My griefs would still be with me there, and peace still be denied me.  
Forgive me Lord; turn not my soul away; for Jesus died to save me.
3. Lord, Thee I seek, I merit naught; yet pity and restore me.  
Just God, be not Thy wrath my lot; Thy Son hath suffered for me.  
Forgive me Lord; turn not my soul away; for Jesus died to save me.

## Absolution (*Announced by the Pastor*)

## Response (*Sung to the tune of 708 "Oh Come All Ye Faithful"*)

The Lord God be with us, and with all His children  
Oh come let us lift our spirits unto the Lord  
With hearts rejoicing, thanks to Him we render  
With joy we come before Him, in gratefulness implore Him  
With thankful hearts adore Him, Christ the Lord!

## The Collect for the Day (*Read by the Pastor*)

*Grant, Almighty God, that the birth of Your only-begotten Son in human flesh may bring true joy to our hearts – we who through sin were held in the bondage of darkness and despair. This we ask through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.*

## The Scripture Lessons:

**The Old Testament Lesson:** (Exodus 1:5-14) The Bible, both Old and New Testament, is a cohesive unit. Both are not only the inspired Word of God and therefore true and accurate in every respect, they complement each other. Without the NT, the OT goes nowhere. Without the OT, the NT leaves us with too many questions. Our Old Testament lesson provides us with the question that is answered in the New Testament.

**The New Testament Lesson:** (Galatians 4:21-5:1) Our New Testament lesson identifies both the true slavery of unbelief and the true freedom that is found only through faith in Jesus Christ, whose birth we today celebrate. Jesus was born to provide the ransom payment for our freedom.

## The Confession of Faith – (The Christmas Creed)

***I believe in God the Father Almighty, Who sent His Son to become my Savior;***

***I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, my Lord, the long-promised Messiah, Who came as foretold, being conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, announced by the angels, worshipped by the shepherds, adored by the Wise Men, Who lived to suffer, die, and rise again, To free me from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil;***

***And I believe in the Holy Spirit, Who has brought me to faith in my Savior, And by whose continuous work in my heart, I rejoice in my salvation, Walk in Christ, Show forth His praises, And will one day live and reign with Him in all eternity. Amen.***