

Rev. Gregory Gibbons
Lola Park Lutheran Church
Redford, MI 48239

Luke 2:8-12

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

INI

I don't think that children today will ever truly understand the joy that I had early in fall when the mailman arrived with the Christmas Wish Book. I waited all year for this. There would be three of them coming. One was from Sears, another from J. C. Penney, and a third from Montgomery Wards. They were filled with all the new toys that were available that Christmas season. I would fight my sister for the right to go through the catalog and pick out all the things that I wanted for Christmas. It would be much easier when we both had a catalog to look through. I spent hours looking and marking and circling what I wanted. I would point out to my parents what I liked and what I really liked and what I really, really liked. I don't think that I went to the pages featuring socks and underwear once. I might have needed that, but that was not what I wanted.

What's on your Christmas wish list? There are things that we want and there are things that we need. Over the last month, I had to get a few things. I had to buy a new dishwasher, a new snow blower, a new battery for my wife's car, and some new glasses so that I can see better. They were not on top of my wish list, but I needed them. A husband might buy his wife a new vacuum cleaner or frying pan, but he had better find some personal gift to give her as well. There are things that we want and things that we truly need.

What about you? Today is Christmas. We are told that a Savior has been born to us. Do you want one? Do you need one? I pray that you answer "yes" to both. We go to the little town of Bethlehem this morning and pray GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD.

That's kind of a weird theme for a Christmas Day sermon, isn't it? Give us this day our daily bread? Well, what do we know about Bethlehem? Bethlehem means "house of bread." Bread is something that we all need in life. It is food to sustain us on our earthly journey. Every culture lives by bread. In most cultures, it is the meal. It might seem lowly, but it is what we need. I know that when I am running late, I might simply have a bagel for lunch. When we aren't feeling well, we might simply have a piece of toast. In the town of bread this day is born the Bread of Life.

God provides us with what we need. And that is a Savior. Our sins had separated us from God. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, had rebelled against God. They listened to the voice of Satan and questioned both God's love and his truthfulness. Sin and death came into the world, and it was not pretty. God's holy Law demands that we be perfect, not just pretty good, not just better than most other people, but absolutely perfect every second of our lives. None of us can live up to that. We can try all we want, but we fail, and we fail miserably. We know that sinful thoughts that we all have. We know the horrible things in our hearts: greed, lust, anger, hatred, envy, jealousy, thanklessness. They lead to sinful words and sinful actions. We hurt others and we hurt ourselves.

God knew our problem. He knew that we could not solve our problem ourselves, He would provide the solution to our problem. He would promise a Savior who would do what we were unable to do for ourselves by keeping the Law perfectly in our stead and he would provide a Savior who would undo what our sins had done, by taking all our sins away.

God first promised that Savior in the Garden of Eden. That Savior would crush the head of Satan. Throughout the centuries God would tell us more about him. He would be descended from Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation.

He would be a prophet greater than Moses, a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek, a king descended from David who would have an eternal kingdom. He would be born of a virgin. And he would be born in Bethlehem.

Bethlehem was significant. It was a little town just outside of Jerusalem. 700 years before the birth of Jesus, we hear the words of Micah the prophet: "But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." Have you ever stopped and thought about those words? There are many who question the validity and truthfulness of the Scriptures. Prophecies need to be fulfilled, don't they? What if someone today said that the Savior would be born in the town of Frankenmuth and 700 years would pass. We probably wouldn't bet money that the prophecy would come true. We can't even be sure that Frankenmuth or the United States will be around 700 years from now. Yet God names the place, and everything is fulfilled.

Yes, Bethlehem is the town. It was the birthplace of David, the greatest King of Israel. Yet there would be an even greater king who would be born there. He would have an everlasting kingdom. He would come from the seemingly dead stump of David's line. From the house of bread would come the Bread of Life.

God works in mysterious ways. On Christmas Eve, we retrace the journey of Mary and Joseph. They lived in a little town in Galilee some hundred miles north. Mary was pregnant and expecting a child. Why would they go to Bethlehem in Judea? Caesar Augustus issued a decree that all the world should be taxed. A census would be taken of the entire Roman world. Every family had to go to the city or community where it had originated. Since both Joseph and Mary were descended from David, they were compelled to make the journey to Bethlehem. God would use this heathen ruler to carry out his divine purpose.

Bethlehem was a nice, quiet, sleepy little town. It was not Jerusalem, a city where one would expect the Savior to be born. God's ways are not our ways. God uses the simple things of this world to shame the proud and the strong. His Son would be born in all humility. He would be born in a lowly stable or cave. He would be wrapped in strips of cloth and his first bed was a manger, a feeding trough for animals.

And yet that child was God himself. He was the Word made flesh. He was the one who brought all things into being. He was God from all eternity. He never stopped being God. He would show his power as God many times throughout his ministry. But the Creator would become a creature. He would become one of us. He would have a human body. He would eat and drink. He would sleep. He would experience everything that we do. God knows what we are going through, He experienced it in his Son. Jesus would know the pain of rejection. He would know physical pain. He would know how sin affects us and those around us. He would come to free us from sin. God would become man. That truly is a mystery that our human reason cannot unravel.

Then ponder what God did after his Son was born. God would announce this birth to the shepherds living out in the fields. These were common, everyday people. We don't know the name of a single one of them, yet they were the recipients of this good news. It wasn't the wealthy or the powerful. It wasn't kings or princes. It was shepherds.

God sent an angel to announce this news. "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that shall be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." Why would they be afraid? It wasn't about little things like the price of sheep or wolves or other physical dangers to them or even worrying about paying those new taxes that Caesar was demanding. They were now in the presence of God's holy angel, and they were unworthy. They were sinful human beings and their sins left them naked and exposed. They were surrounded by the glory of God.

But they could now put their fears away. God had good news of great joy for them and for all people. A Savior had been born that very night. He was not just a Savior. He was their Savior. We can only imagine all the emotions

running through their hearts that evening. This is what God's people were awaiting for centuries and now it was here. Where would they find this Savior? They would find him in Bethlehem. He would be wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.

They didn't stop to debate anything. They didn't say that it would be inconvenient for them to go at this time. They knew that they had to go, and they had to go right now. They would see this gift that God had provided for them in his Son. The one lying in the feeding trough would be the one who would feed the world.

This Child is here for us. God wants to drive away our fears as well. When God gave his Law on Mt. Sinai, it was a scary sight. There was smoke and fire and thunder and lightning. But now God comes as a baby. Babies aren't frightening. Babies are cute. We want to touch them. We want to hold them in our arms. No one is afraid of a baby. This is God's love shining forth.

He is the one who feeds our souls. Jesus said: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Bethlehem was known for two things. It was the birthplace of King David, and it was known for sheep. What was the purpose of raising sheep? Well, there were some who needed the wool for clothing and people liked to eat lamb chops. But the major reason for the sheep is that they were used for sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem.

God demanded that sacrifices be made for sin. Lambs were used often. Now if someone was going to come to Jerusalem for Passover, one could bring his own lamb. But would you really want to bring that lamb a hundred miles or so? It would be much easier to buy one in Jerusalem. Where did they get their sacrificial lambs? From the shepherds' fields in Bethlehem.

There would be a sacrifice from the shepherds' field that would take away the sin of the world. He is that child in the manger. He was the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. That is the reason he came into this world: to suffer and to die, to be our divine Substitute who took all our sins away for all time. He would give his flesh for the life of the world.

As we eat in faith, we receive eternal life. Behind the cradle is the cross, and behind the cross is a crown, the crown of eternal life. That is what God gives us at Christmas. Our sins are wiped away and we will receive Paradise, now restored. It is a world of perfect peace, joy, and love, a world where there is no more pain, sorrow, or death, a place where we will live forever in the presence of our Savior.

Give us this day our daily bread. When we say these words, do we think of Jesus, the Bread of Life? We should. He is the one who sustains us every day as we feed on his precious words. He is the Bread of Life from the house of bread. He is the Savior we want. He is the Savior we need. Have a blessed Christmas! AMEN.