

“Once He Came in blessing”

(Matthew 1:18-25 – Midweek Advent 1 – December 3, 2025)

Matthew 1:18-25 – ¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. ²⁰But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.” ²²So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ²³“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.” ²⁴Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, ²⁵and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.

Dear Redeemed in Christ Jesus:

This Advent we will consider as our theme the words of the hymn we just sang: “Once He came in blessing.” This hymn tells of Jesus’ first coming as our Savior, humble and lowly to win our salvation. It tells how He still comes within us, calling us by His Word to faith and salvation. It tells how He will come at last to bring the faithful to heaven. Today we focus on the first verse, concerning Jesus’ first coming to win our salvation.

“Once He came in blessing, All our ills redressing.” That says a lot. We have ills from which we cannot save ourselves. But the Savior came to redress – to bring a cure – where there was no cure.

How often in life we feel various kinds of ills. Perhaps especially, as these colder months come rolling in, we feel the ills of a cold or a flu setting in. Or as the long winter months take their toll, we may feel ills of tiredness of body or depression of mind. Sometimes, we may feel the ills of a debilitating disease, disability, and chronic pain that roll into our life, and we must learn to cope with a life change. Maybe we feel the devastation of a terminal illness, and the stark reality of our complete inability to redress our ills. The earthly doctor has no cure.

But Jesus does. “Once He came in blessing, All our ills redressing” – starting with sin. Scripture tells us that sin is the root of all our ills. Sin is like an incurable cancer. It brings death to 100% of the human population. Sin is killing us.

Sin, after all, separates us from the God who gives life. God commands perfection in His holy Law that says: “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,*’ and *‘your neighbor as yourself.’*” The Law says: “*Do this and you will live*” (Luke 10:27-28). But our sinful nature objects: “I want to find life my own way. I want to devote my heart, soul, strength, and mind to serving my own interests. I want to love myself and neglect God and the people He put around me to love.” So God’s Law pronounces condemnation: “*The soul who sins shall die*” (Ezekiel 18:4).

Sin eats away, not only at our body, but also at our soul. You can try all the earthly remedies you like, but they will only mask the problem. You can try applying the balm of worldly pleasures, happiness, and throw in lots of seasonal joy and laughter; but sin still brings inevitable suffering and sorrow. You can try taking the remedy of healthy living, positive thinking, and throw in all kinds of worldly-prescribed forms of spirituality; but sin still brings inevitable death and hopelessness.

This is why the angel announced to Joseph, concerning the Savior: “*You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins*” (vs. 21). “Once He came in blessing,” to redress our chief ill of sin. And where sin is cured, there is true fullness of life, salvation, and eternal hope. “*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 6:23).

So a baby would be born. Great! But how many other babies had been born through history; and how many more babies would be born into this world? What can a little baby do to cure a world of ills? What can a little baby do to save a world of sinners from death? What was so special about this Baby to be born of Mary?

“And what about a baby born out of wedlock!” thought Joseph with alarm. “What about a baby I did not even father!” It seemed to Joseph that Mary, to whom he was betrothed in marriage, must have been unfaithful to her vows; she must have conceived by some other man! It looked like just one more baby would be born of sinful flesh into a sinful world. Joseph had in mind to call off the wedding plans, to divorce Mary in quiet shame and broken-heartedness.

But the angel appeared and told him: “*Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit*” (vs. 20). The Savior to be born was no ordinary baby. Mary was a virgin, yet by the

Holy Spirit's miracle she had conceived and was expecting. *“So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us’”* (vs. 22-23).

This was not just any baby – this was God's baby and Mary's baby all in one! This is the only Son of Man ever born in this world who could look you in the eye and say, “I am your God. Before you were ever conceived or born, from eternity I knew you!” Yet, you could hold Him as a Baby in your arms; you could play with Him as a Child in your neighborhood; and you could walk with Him as a Man along country roads. He is holy God almighty; yet He is your Brother in the flesh!

So our hymn verse accurately describes our Savior who “Came in likeness lowly, Son of God most holy.”

As God, He has all power to redress our ills, to cure us of sin and its horrible effects, once for all. He showed but a glimpse of His infinite power by healing the sick, casting out demons, quieting violent storms – miracles enacted at His Word, by which witnesses were left in awe and worship of Him.

Yet, when it came to curing our sin, His power and glory were completely hidden under His “likeness lowly.” In Philippians 2:6-8 we read of Jesus: *“who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”*

Why didn't the Creator come to His creatures robed in infinite power and glory, reigning as a King in a palace, instead of being born in poverty and lowliness? Why did He make Himself as nothing, walking such a lowly road, a man of sorrows, despised and rejected by men? Why did heaven's King make Himself the Servant of servants, humble and obedient to the point of death on a cross?

It had to be this way because of His purpose in coming. As the angel explained: *“for He will save His people from their sins”* (vs. 21). He came so humbly because we sinners could not see God's full glory and live. He came so lowly because the only way to save us sinners was by sacrifice. For a world of sinners who have broken God's holy Law, God's justice had to be served. God's Law said: *“without shedding of blood there is no remission”* of sins (Hebrews 9:22). So Jesus was born as the representative Man, to stand in our place under God's justice. Though He was

completely innocent, He bore all our sins to the cross. He took our full punishment as if He were the criminal of criminals.

And as “Very God of Very God,” His perfect sacrifice is worthy to take away all the sins of the world. So in Him who “Came in likeness lowly” God’s perfect justice is served; and at the same time, His perfect love for us is maintained. In Him who is the “Son of God most holy,” God is declaring us holy! Through faith in His Son, God is calling us His sons and daughters!

So our hymn rejoices in this Savior who “Bore the cross to save us, Hope and freedom gave us.” *“Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows... He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed”* (Isaiah 53:4-5). Jesus has carried the root of our problem, sin, to the cross. With all sin removed, now comes redress for all our ills. Now comes true relief from our griefs and sorrows. Now comes true healing and hope for us humans.

Even if today we are feeling the griefs, pains, and sorrows of life in a fallen world, the apostle Paul has this to say about our blessed hope in Jesus: *“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:16-19).

Our sin is cured. We are God’s eternal children in Jesus Christ. And though we suffer ills which this world’s best doctors cannot heal, the Spirit reminds us of the eternal healing we have in Jesus. Even Jesus Himself suffered in this world, before entering His heavenly glory. Likewise, we may experience ills and suffering here as we walk daily with Him. Yet, we will experience perfect healing and joys beyond compare when He brings us into His heavenly glory.

So this Advent, we thank and praise our Savior, as we sing: “Once He came in blessing, All our ills redressing.” By His humble and lowly birth, life, and death, and by His glorious resurrection, Jesus has given us eternal healing and hope.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.