

## ***Christmas – God in the flesh: The Hope of God***

*Dear Listeners,*

In the past services of the *Voice of the Church* during this month of December at this time I spoke to you about the *birth* of the Lord Jesus as recorded by the apostle *John* in his account of the gospel. In this account John speaks about the Lord and Saviour as the *Word*, the Word of God, who was with God and who was God. Why, you might wonder, introduce Him that way? Well, John himself explains this at the end of his account, where he says, “that you may *believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the *Son of God*, and that believing you may have *life* in His Name.” “That you may have *life*...” Indeed, then he doesn’t mean the *life* that we have *today*. That life is weak and mortal. This life is like grass, as a flower in the grass. He flourishes like a flower in the field, the wind blows over it and it is gone. *This life* is nothing but a constant death. That’s not the way it was in the beginning, when the *Word* was the life of men: then *God* breathed into his nostrils the breath of life so that he would live with God *eternally*. Due to *sin*, however, we became *weak*, mortal people. Due to *sin*, death came; yes, eternal death! Well, John says, by *believing* in this Jesus, the Word of God who came into our *weak and mortal flesh*, by *faith in Him* we have this *life* again, immortal life, *eternal* life!

What great *gospel*, dear listeners, this story of the birth of Jesus Christ as revealed to us in John’s account turned out to be! It’s the story of *light* and *life*, indeed! Or is it? Well, no, it’s not *all* light and life. There also is *darkness*; there is a world (the world He created) which received Him not, even *His own people*. They cried out, “Crucify Him!” that’s Christmas too: *shepherds* who worshipped Him and praised and glorified God but *leaders* who ignored Him and stayed at home; *wise men* who came and worshipped, while *Herod* wanted to kill Him! So, was Christmas a *failure*? No, Christmas was *not* a failure. Although it is true, as John reports, “He came to that which was His own, but His own did *not* receive Him; yet (!) to all who received Him, to those who *believed* in His Name, He gave the right to become children of God!” Thankfully, *they* are there too in the Christmas story: those who *believe* in Jesus’ Name, shepherds, the wise men, Mary, Joseph, and later on the *disciples* who walked away from their ships and followed Him. They are there, by the grace of God, people who *believe*, also *today*; people who hear His Word and embrace this Saviour and submit to His Word, because in it the love of God is revealed! They may become *children* of God! Thank God, the darkness has not overcome the light. The light wins! That’s the miracle of Christmas!

God so *loved* the world that He gave His only Son for that! And whoever *believes* the Son has the Father and whoever has the Father has *eternal life*! Now this gospel is proclaimed to you indiscriminately: “... so that *whoever* believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” The ‘*whoever*’ appeared to be a Levi, who was called out of his tax-collectors office, and a Mary who had been possessed by demons, and a woman who was known as a public sinner, and a Paul who had persecuted the Church of God! *Whoever*, that’s as broad as you can take it! It does not matter who you are, what you’ve been like this far, what your

background may have been, what you think of yourself or what others think or say about you ... *whoever!* Everyone who has nothing to present to God, but the debts you've made and the sins you've committed! Yes, dear listener, that's what this gospel proclaims!

When John records these words of the Lord Jesus in that beautiful *gospel in a nutshell*, in John 3:16, the Lord Jesus added that God gave His Son *to be lifted up!* Then our first thought will be, no doubt, thinking of the *end* of His life on earth when He was lifted up on the cross where He bore our guilt, paid for our sins, and bore God's wrath for us and in our place. When the Lord Jesus says that the Son of man is *lifted up* in order to obtain salvation from perdition and eternal life, however, He does not only refer to His elevated position on the cross, but also to the fact that the Son of man must be *lifted up out of this world* of sin and perdition, to be *exalted* at the right hand of God! The Lord Jesus was very much aware of this *course* with His life; in chapter 12:32 He states, "And I, when I am lifted up from the *earth*, will draw *all men* to myself." That is the course of salvation, the course of life: out of this world, away from the wrath, in Christ!

How great, dear listener, is the love of God, indeed, in that this *exaltation* of the Lord Jesus is proclaimed to us, to *you* and *me!* The Son of man had to be *lifted up*, for God so loved the world that He gave His only Son for that, for that *lifting up*... not just on the cross but also in His *ascension*. In the throne of God He has all power in heaven and on earth, and from that *throne* He sent His apostles, directed His messengers, and commands His *ministers* to proclaim this gift of God's love. He is the *ascended* Lord, lifted up as the Head of all those who believe, and through Him God reconciled to Himself all things whether on earth or in heaven! In Him all things hold together! Thus we may see in God's gift in *Bethlehem* that the glory of the gift has *cosmic proportions* indeed! In the proclamation we may see Him in that exalted position. In the proclamation we learn to look up to Him, says the apostle Paul in 2 Cor 3, and doing so we already are *changed* from one degree of glory to another, and *already* death is conquered in us!

This love of God and hope in Christ is ours *by faith!* That is the *only*, the *absolute* condition: those who believe in Him shall not perish but have *eternal life*. May the messages that have come to you via this "Voice of the Church" meet with faith in you, dear listeners! Thank you again for listening, and have a blessed New Year in this hope in Him!