

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church-WELS
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
December 27, 2009 Christmas 1 Hebrews 2:14-18



Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

Every year, around this time – *USA Today* has on the front page in large print the word ***Passages!*** It’s all about the people who passed away this past year. People who were gifted and rich and famous and beautiful. This past year a man named Steve McNair passed away. Do you know who he was? He was really very famous. He was a professional football player – an NFL quarterback who played for the Tennessee Titans in the 2000 Super Bowl. His team was behind and time was running out – when he led his team down the field. In 48 seconds they moved the ball 87 yards. That’s pretty incredible – 87 yards – almost the whole length of the field in 48 seconds. He got the ball to the 1 yard line – 36 inches from the end zone – tie the game – go into OT and win. But they couldn’t make it – that last essential yard! If Heaven was the end zone – we can’t get there by our self – you can’t. You know why. You have to be perfect to get into Heaven and nobody’s perfect – except Jesus. Jesus gets us into heaven because he died to wash away all your sins. We are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. This first Sunday after Christmas God’s Word is sweet Gospel comfort and encouragement:

Jesus Shares In Our Humanity.

- 1. He sets us free from the fear of death**
- 2. He helps us when we are tempted.**

The part of God’s Word we are concentrating on this morning – is from the letter to the Hebrews. We don’t know who the Holy Spirit used – to write down this letter. We are pretty sure it was *not* the Apostle Paul. Paul begins his letters with his name – as was the custom back in early New Testament times. You started your letters by saying this is from me to you. Peter and James and Jude and John did the same. So – if Hebrews isn’t by Paul, Simon Peter, James the brother of the Lord Jesus, Jude or John – then who did write it? Very likely a man named Apollos. Apollos was made eloquent by the Holy Spirit. He was a man who – again by the power of the Holy Spirit – had an exceedingly deep understanding of the Old Testament. Do we? Do we appreciate what it was like – like the little Lord Jesus – to go to Synagogue? Synagogue is not worship like Church – where the Lutheran Church – is a *liturgical* Church. Liturgical means there is a plan – a *path* of worship – a method to what we do and why we do it! That’s very likely something we take for granted – but it’s really important. Liturgical means you know what to expect. We will sing. Garrison Keillor talks about that all the time. You can ask Lutherans to sing, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow...” Give them a starting note – no

accompaniment – and within a word or two – we are singing at least alto and bass, too! When you come to Church we confess our sins – our failures and hurtful mistakes. We confess the sin we inherited from our mom and dad who got it from grandma and grandpa – all the way back to Eve and Adam. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. That means he was born without sin! We have Bible readings – where we discern law and gospel – sin and grace. We bring our thank offerings – that’s worship, too! We say our prayers – for ourselves – which is not selfish – but an act of faith. We pray for each other. We have Lord’s Supper. That’s really precious. It’s a blessing to come to Lord’s Supper often – well prepared – appreciating what’s going on. That way – you can come often and it’s still special! Synagogue was not liturgical worship as much as it was as the name signifies – Bible school – Bible study. The rabbi would read Scripture and explain it – and the men would discuss it! In the synagogue in Nazareth – where Jesus grew up – he told them – **Today this Scripture** – the promise of the Messiah – **was fulfilled in their hearing!** They understood exactly what that meant. Jesus was saying, “I am the Son of God and your Savior!” And they took hold of him to push him off a cliff! Blasphemy! That’s what they thought that was! We watched you grow up! We know your parents! You are a carpenter! You can’t be my Savior! *But Jesus was and He is!*

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. People die all the time. This past year 138 people who died – were written up in the newspaper. A Senator – who drank – then drove his car off a bridge – into water where a lady drowned and died – *himself died*. A guy named Bob (Bogle) died. He was part of the group that did the theme song for Hawaii-50. A guy named Vic (Mizzy) died. He did the song for the Addam’s Family – with the finger snaps – I loved that! John Hughes was only 2 years older than I am – when he died. He did the *Home Alone* movie and *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*. What a gift – to be able to make people laugh. You can go to Chicago and do a Ferris Bueller Tour. How much fun would that be? Did John Hughes know that Jesus took all his sins away – so he could be gloriously happy every day for eternity? Karl Malden was almost 100 (97). He was famous for being in all those American Express Card commercials. “Don’t leave home without it!” You see stickers that say, “Jesus – don’t leave earth without Him!” Phillip Simmons died. He was almost 100 (97) years old. He was a blacksmith. He made things out of wrought iron. They say there are more than 500 places – in South Carolina – where his gates – and other works of art are. Wrought iron – will last practically forever! But not quite! In this world *everything* rusts – *everything* decays – *everything* falls apart. People certainly do! Phillip Simmons died – in his sleep. Isn’t that the way we want to die – in our sleep? Imagine how wondrous that would be – to say your prayers – when you are almost 100 years old. To pray, “*Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake – I pray the Lord my soul to take. And this I ask for Jesus’ sake...*” And then you fall asleep – and you do die before you wake. And you wake up in Heaven! How amazing would that be? I wonder if – at first you think – no – I’m dreaming – and this is quite the dream! No – this isn’t a dream – this is real – and I’m in Heaven! Wow! I mean wow doesn’t begin to express the wow you must feel – when you see angels and hear them singing – and you realize – I’m home!

I watched a video on the Internet – no less than 37 celebrities – 37 of the most talented and gifted and most beautiful and richest people in the whole wide world. I counted no less than 37 of the most blessed people in the whole wide world – wishing me a Merry Christmas. I listened very carefully as they said again and again, “Happy holidays!” One person said, “Merry Christmas! Happy Hanukah! Happy Kwanza!” I was told to drive carefully. They wished me

peace and happiness and all their love. There was not a single word about Jesus – the Christ child – my Savior. One person said, “God bless you!” And that was Ozzy Osborn! Maybe Ozzy knows about Jesus. I pray that he does. Jesus died for Ozzy, too! And Jesus died to forgive me – if I think for a moment that I am better – more deserving of Jesus’ forgiving love than Ozzy Osborn! Do you get the WELS daily devotion – e-mail? It is a very wonderful message 6 days a week. It’s there first thing in the morning. It said the other day – there is no time of year like now – where people work so very hard at being happy! Dom DeLouise died. He was a comedian – a professional make you happy – make you laugh person. That’s not easy! They say Dom DeLouise was a genuinely warm and charming person – who would make you laugh – even when they weren’t filming. How nice is that? Ricardo Montalban died. Remember him on Fantasy Island? Mr. Rourke – and little Tattoo would say, “*De plane! De plane!*” And people would come to Fantasy Island to make some fantasy come true – to be happy! Sometimes what they asked for wasn’t the fantasy they wanted – it was painful, in fact. But it made them better in the end! Jesus died – so that we might spend eternity not in some make believe place but Paradise itself. A real place – where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. In Heaven Jesus will make everything – *absolutely everything* new!

For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Jesus made atonement for our sins. Atonement – *at one – ment* – one again with our Heavenly Father after sin separated us. A woman named Mary Travers died – Mary from Peter, Paul and Mary. You need to be almost as old as I am to appreciate Peter, Paul and Mary. If I had a hammer – I’d hammer in the morning, I’d hammer evening – I’d hammer out love between my brothers and my sisters – all over this land – racial equality! That’s what that song was about. Peter, Paul and Mary did *Puff the Magic Dragon*. Now what was that all about? Was that about a little boy and his toy dragon named Puff? Or was it about drug abuse? Huh? I bet it was about drug abuse – and so? That’s how our sinful minds work. Assume the worst – until proven otherwise! That’s wrong! Koko Taylor died. She was a sharecropper’s daughter. She was born literally dirt poor – and yet she had what they call a regal bearing. She had that way of *just standing there* – that made you think – this is somebody important! Do you know what I mean? I know people like that. They are not puffed up or proud or arrogant. They have an air of dignity! Like my friend Mr. Fairhurst – from Scotland Yard – who stands tall and straight – with dignity. Mr. Fairhurst – I will never forget – when people were coming to Lord’s Supper – and there were more people than room – and it would be instinctive – to squish together – Mr. Fairhurst stepped back – when everyone else stepped forward – he stepped back! That’s a humility of heart – that only Jesus’ love can inspire! But I digress – Koko Taylor died – the daughter of a sharecropper – who sang the blues! I know people who are always singing the blues. That’s kind of the opposite of Paul’s words to the *Philippians* – **Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Don’t be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to the Lord and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus!** That’s the kind of peace we have – because Jesus died and rose again to save us!

A man named Sol Price – *you can’t make this up* – a guy whose last name was Price – invented the concept of warehouse superstore sales. You know – buy a gallon size jar of olives – and a gallon size jar of catsup and a gallon size jar of mustard and a gallon size jar of peanut butter and a gallon size jar of grape jelly – and think of the savings! Mr. Price was 93 years old. He had literally billions – not millions but billions of dollars from this warehouse

shopping idea. But all those billions of dollars could not pay for a single sin – not one. His sins like mine and yours were far *far* more expensive! Sins cost blood – innocent blood that only Jesus could shed! And he did! That’s the miracle of God’s love for you. Jesus paid that price without complaint!

Steve McNair died this year – the NFL quarter-back from the Tennessee Titans who engineered that powerful comeback in the 2000 Super Bowl – 87 yards in 48 seconds! Steve died – murdered in his sleep – while he was sleeping on the couch of his girlfriend – by his girlfriend! How sad is that? It would be very tempting to think – I’m not perfect – nobody is! But at least I’m better than that guy! At least I would never do anything as bad as that! At his funeral Steve’s Pastor said, **“Don’t judge!”** This is what Jesus was talking when he said in the Sermon on the Mount – don’t judge! Don’t judge the motives and don’t judge the eternal welfare of anyone else’s soul! Don’t think – I for one would never commit adultery – like who? David who fought and defeated the warrior giant Goliath when he was just a boy? Like King David who wrote, “The LORD is my Shepherd!” I for one would never deny Jesus. Not like Simon Peter who quite literally walked on water? I for one would never commit sins of terrible weakness – like who? Like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah? The Christ-child was born into this sin infected world – to save sinners just like Steve McNair – just like Peter, Andrew, James and John. Just like the Apostle Paul – who not only said but genuinely believed – **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst!”** Jesus came to save sinners just like us – so that we might live lives dedicated to reflecting his light and sharing his love. As this year of grace draws to an end – know that whatever you have been – whatever you have done in the past 12 months – Jesus died to wash it all away. As we stand on the brink of a brand new year – know that whatever the new year holds – Jesus holds the future safe in his nail marked hands. So don’t be scared! Don’t be scared – not even scared of death – for Jesus’ sake. Amen!

To God alone all glory!

