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St. John's Lutheran Church – Kimball, NE  
Children's Christmas Program (Advent IV)  
December 20, 2011  
Program: God's Love at Christmas

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

There's something most remarkable about children and youth proclaiming the birth of Jesus Christ. As you know, Jesus became a bit angry with His disciples when they tried to prevent children from coming to see Jesus. In response to this nonsense, Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me and do not forbid them for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Jesus is the Savior of children and youth as well as adults. And so this morning, we give thanks for the youth of congregation and their proclamation of the Savior's birth. We give thanks for you parents in allowing them to participate in this great occasion. And we certainly give thanks for our congregation's many volunteers who made all this possible. Thank you all for proclaiming the love of God in Christ Jesus.

And what is it that they are proclaiming? God's love at Christmas. This season, like no other time of the year, allows us to speak and proclaim God's love in ways and in situations that many people might take exception to. We get to say "Merry Christmas" for days to everyone we meet. The name of Christ is spoken to friend, neighbor, and stranger in blessing. Even if we say "Happy Holidays" we are telling them that we want their holy days to be joyous and happy.

God's love at Christmas is all about Jesus. And our precious youth have just told us about that love in word and song. It's an old story, one that goes back to the beginning of time. God created the human race in His image in the beautiful perfection of Eden. Adam and Eve stood together, as husband and wife, in bliss and harmony. The entire world lay before them. It was theirs to be lived in and enjoyed. A marvelous gift of grace and love from our creator-God.

But then, that perfection was when the Devil, that ancient foe of old, deceived Adam and Eve into eating forbidden fruit. "You will be like God" was the lie. They ate and found shame, death, and fear. How God responded to Adam and Eve's original sin reveals much about who God is. He could have been done with them and this creation, wiped them out in righteous anger. Instead, God reveals His true nature. God loved Adam and Eve (and you and me) by making a promise: the Son of a woman would undo the Devil's evil. Genesis 3:15, the first promise of the Savior, revealed the love God has for His people. God Himself will fix this mess we humans made for ourselves. And from that moment forward, the longing prayer of God's people has been for the woman's Seed to come. And so the children sang, O Come, O Come, Immanuel.

And He did come. As the Scriptures say, in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, to redeem those held under the bondage of sin, death, and the devil. At just the right time, God the Father demonstrated His love to you and me yet again by sending Jesus, His Son, to be born of the Virgin Mary. That grand story forms the heart and core of Christmas and the Christian faith.

The details are beautiful and stirring: the angel Gabriel being sent to a young virgin woman named Mary, the promise that she'd give birth to a Son who would not only be her flesh and blood Child but would also be the very Son of God. Jesus Christ is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity and also true Man, born of the Virgin Mary. Those are the words the youth memorized from Luther's Small Catechism. This Child is their Lord, our Lord. He is the love of God the Father come in human flesh and blood.

But we mustn't forget the beauty of the Joseph and Mary arduous trip to Bethlehem resulting from the decree of taxation from Caesar Augustus, nor the manger, or the shepherds, and the angelic decree "for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." On that first Christmas day, God's promise to send the Child of a woman to save the world was fulfilled. And the faithful have been coming to worship Him ever since. And so the children sang, O Come, All Ye Faithful.

But any retelling of Christmas is incomplete without rehearsing what this Son of Mary did to save the world. His birth in Bethlehem was only the beginning. God loved you and me by not only sending Jesus to be born, but also in Jesus dying and rising again. The angel told Joseph, Jesus' step-father, that Mary's Son would save His people from their sins. Some 30 years after the glory of Bethlehem, we find God saving the world in the shame of Calvary. Those perfect hands and feet, cared for by Mary and Joseph, would be thrust through with cruel Roman nails.

Our youth described this in the words from the Small Catechism, Jesus saved us "not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death."

But in the marvel and wonder of God's divine plan, Jesus' innocent suffering and death is not the end of the story. Three days later Jesus rose from the dead. The Christmas and Easter triumph is proclaimed week after week, day after day, into all the world. The divine Son of the Woman is utterly triumphant. And so the children sang portions of God Loves Me Dearly in thanksgiving.

And yet, our youth's proclamation of the Christ Child is not yet complete. They have told us that God loves you and me by giving us life forever. The Garden of Eden had been closed when Adam and Eve committed that dreadful original sin. But that sin, and every sin committed since, is now paid for in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus has opened the way back to the tree of life, back to paradise, through His own tree of Calvary.

Our youth described God's love demonstrated in the gift of eternal life with these words from the Small Catechism, "That I may be his own and live under him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true." Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Mary came to this earth to take us unto Himself in the bliss of His kingdom. Jesus gives and gives and gives. And so the children sang the final stanza of God Loves Me Dearly in thanksgiving for these precious gifts.

This is what today is all about: our children proclaiming that Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, is God's love given to the world at all times and all places. This true, saving faith is what puts the "merry" into Merry Christmas.

Well done kids. You are good and faithful heralds of God's marvelous love. To God be all praise and honor. And a Merry Christmas to you all.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.