

From the Manger to the Cross

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Well, I know we have a lot of guests with us this morning. We're very glad that you're with us as you join family for the holiday and we are glad that you have chosen to be with us here at Truth Community here on what is known as Christmas Eve. Now, someone who knew nothing about the Bible would have no way of knowing the underlying meaning of this so-called holiday season if all they had to go on was the world around them and what they see in it. They see a generic celebration with snow and gifts and Santa without any mention of Christ or without any mention of God, for that matter. You know what I refer to. I don't need to belabor the point. In one sense, I would say that's okay. What I mean by that is this: I don't expect our culture, I don't expect our world to impart spiritual instruction to the masses. In fact, I don't want them to. I don't want unsaved people trying to articulate the meaning of Christ to others because it is inevitable that the message would be mangled beyond recognition, but it does motivate that ignorance that we see in the society around us, it does motivate what I want to share with you from the passage that I read earlier from Matthew 1 which is at the root of everything that is supposedly being celebrated in this season.

From Matthew 1, in fact let's do this, let's read it again to set it firmly in our minds again afresh, Matthew 1, beginning in verse 18. The key to learning is repetition. The key to embracing and understanding Scripture is no different. Repetition is the key to understanding and learning. Matthew 1:18, we could never read it enough.

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. 19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. 20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." 22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 "Behold, the Virgin shall be with Child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us." 24 And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord

commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, 25 but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

Now, friends, here is what I would want to see just by way of kind of a preliminary observation about this passage. There is so much more going on here than the moment of time of the birth of Christ. This is really the focal point of two ends of eternity, you might say, that are going on here. You can see that something of transcendent chronological significance is going on in what is said because he alludes to the fact, Matthew does, he alludes to the fact that prophecy is being fulfilled and he alludes to Isaiah, the prophet, who lived some 700 years before the time of Christ, announcing and carrying out a plan of God that was determined prior to the time of Isaiah. In the mind of God, this plan was determined before time began and then Christ comes and fulfills the prophecy that is in furtherance of an even greater plan, and he speaks of the reality that there is a forgiveness of sins tied in with this birth; something that looks forward to an eschatological end, toward an end of time when our sins are fully forgiven, for those of us that know Christ, and we enter into the final kingdom of God. So stretching from eternity past to eternity future, you see gathered up in this one passage the wonder of what the significance of this season really is.

What I want to do in a simple way, we looked at this passage several years ago before most of you were even at Truth Community, we're going to see three fundamental truths about our Savior from this passage to sharpen your meditation on Christ today and tomorrow and the days to come. But here's what I would plead with you, knowing that some of you are here and you are not Christians, here's what I would plead with you, is that what we're talking about today and what we are laying before you today is something that far transcends any meditation that we could have on so-called Christmas. In the next 45 minutes or so, what we are laying here before you is the one single hope of your eternal soul. We are laying forth the one single message that can deliver you from sin and judgment. We are laying before you the one thing that can be the answer to your broken heart and the discouragement that you feel as you go through life. This passage which speaks to the birth of Christ, is a spotlight in a dark world that leads us to the one place where there is an eternal unshakable hope that is the answer to every need of the human heart.

So that's what I want to talk about here this morning. It's the greatest of messages. It's a blessing for all of us to hear it. It is a particular blessing for me to be able to stand here and to speak it. I've said this many times over the years, I'll say it more often, but I don't say it nearly as often as I think it. I'm mindful of what the Apostle Paul said, "Who is adequate for these things?" Who is adequate to speak of such glorious truth? Who is adequate to speak and to declare to men who are passing through like a mist on the earth, who is adequate to speak that which would be the salvation of their souls if they would only hear and receive and embrace it? Certainly not this speaker here this morning. We are all in debt to the grace of God. We are all in debt to the mercy of God to give us a message like this and to allow us to hear it in our own language, to hear it in words that we can understand. You know, beloved, think, you know, there are people still today who do not have the word of God in their own language. There are people still today who have

never heard the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. It's easy for us to take it for granted. We gather together week after week to hear it, but this is a message that has been hidden from many. This is a message that Scripture says angels longed to look into it in order that they might see and understand the things that have been freely given to us. So I say that not to chastise you in any way but to give you a sense of profound reverence and gratitude for the word of God as we come to see it unfolded here this morning in this time that God has appointed.

What is it that we can learn about Christmas from this passage? More particularly, what is it that we should see in the coming of Jesus Christ to earth as it has been revealed in Scripture? Well, first of all, you should see this, point 1 if you're taking notes here today is this: is that Jesus came to forgive our sins. Jesus came to forgive our sins. What you have in the remembrance of the birth of Christ is not a sentimental emotional feeling that comes from seeing Christmas lights and nativity scenes and all of that. Those things are okay as far as they go but that is not the significance of it. That is not at the core of why we have this remembrance from year to year. You must always think about this time of year connected to the singular great thought that Jesus Christ came to earth in order to forgive our sins.

This time of year is a shorthand reference for the birth of Jesus Christ some 2,000 years ago and the most fundamental thing that we can remember is that Jesus Christ came to intervene for sinners just like you. And listen, when we say that Christ came to intervene for you, here's what we're saying, don't miss some of the things, some of the presuppositions that underlie a statement like that. What we are saying to each and every one of you is that you need intervention. You are not okay with God on your own. You do not have the ability to save your soul and you are not fit to meet God in the inevitable day of judgment that is coming. You are not fit on your own to meet him. You need intervention. You need someone to come and help you. You need someone to come and deliver you, to come and save you, and what this passage tells us is that Jesus Christ came to do exactly that.

Look at chapter 1 in verse 18 where it says, "the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly." Notice the message of the angel here in verse 20, "an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus,'" here it is, "for." The angel is declaring the purpose of the coming of Jesus Christ to Joseph in this statement that just now follows, "for He will save His people from their sins."

Beloved, don't miss it. Don't miss it in the sentimental things that can sometimes occupy our minds and our thoughts and our affections in this time. Don't miss the fundamental spiritual purpose declared by the angel to Joseph of the reason that Christ came to earth. He came to earth so that he would save his people from their sins. There was a spiritual

mercy mission at work at Bethlehem 2,000 years ago and Jesus made this point as well in some of the things that he said in his teaching ministry that followed some 30 years after his birth. He said in Luke 19:10, he said, "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." The angel said, "His people need to be saved." Jesus said, "I have come to seek and to save that which was lost." Well, what is salvation? What does it mean to be saved? To need to be saved means that you are in danger of death and destruction. To speak of salvation is to speak of a divine deliverance of those who are in sin and in rebellion against God. That's why this need to be saved.

You see, friends, it's basic to those that have heard Scripture taught but don't we know from other areas that it's attention to the basics that will lead to a good outcome? Football coaches speak of blocking and tackling, blocking and tackling being the key to a successful team. Well, you know that from the very beginnings of which you play. You don't move beyond the fundamentals in order to find success, you keep your mind on the fundamentals and you practice them successfully in order to succeed on the field. Well, in a spiritual way, to speak of these things I realize is to come back to the blocking and tackling of spiritual life, but Scripture says, Scripture would teach us and warn us and encourage us to be mindful of the fact that we are all rather dull spiritually, that we are slow to learn, that we are slow to take to heart, we are slow to remember the most basic elements of truth that are necessary for the good of your soul.

What is the fundamental that underlies the fact that Jesus came to forgive our sins? It's this: it's that your sins, beloved, your sins separate you from God and place you under his judgment. Isaiah 59:2 says, "your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear."

You know, it's funny to me that this time of year can be twisted into a general goodwill message that God just loves everybody and everybody is going to go to heaven in the end. That's not true. Scripture says the gate is narrow that leads to life and there are few who find it, and the reason that few find it is because they are born into sin, they are dead in sin, and they don't discern spiritual truth properly. They need to be saved. They need to be forgiven. Every one of us was born into that condition of needing to hear the truth about Christ because we are born into sin and we love it that way. By nature you are a sinner. By choice you are a sinner. You're not a sinner simply because you commit individual acts of sin, you're a sinner because by nature that's what you do. It's as natural to you as being a fish in water for the unsaved man. Scripture would teach us that every one of us has broken God's law, every one of us has a barrier of guilt between ourselves and God that forbids access to him. Romans 1:18 says, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." That's a condition of eternal guilt, of great eternal consequence.

I look out on your faces mindful of judgment to come, mindful of your souls being unredeemed for many of you, and I fear. I fear that you would once again brush off and disregard the one thing that can save your soul, the message of the Gospel which is powerful to save, but the truth of the matter is from God's word, unless your guilt is forgiven, you will suffer an eternal punishment in hell. You are guilty of sin. You are

guilty of rebellion against God and you cannot save yourself from the righteous judgment that that requires. Well, this is to speak the ruin of the human race, isn't it? This is to speak of our own individual ruin, isn't it? That's why this passage that we read from Matthew 1 should be so precious and dear to your heart, that the message of the angels should resound in your ear and be that which attracts you, which draws you, which excites the affections of your heart for that which is most eternally significant to you, that which makes everything that happens in this life of minor consequence in comparison.

Look at it again with me in verse 21, mindful of the weight of guilt that we all carry in our own self. We hear the angel, the divine messenger from God sent to Joseph saying, "Joseph, this Child in Mary's womb has the ultimate divine mission in His hands. He will save His people from their sins." You see, beloved, don't get tired of the message and don't take it for granted, especially those of you maybe that are a little bit younger just coming into your years of conscious thought. Understand that when Jesus came to earth, there was something profound going on. God was taking the initiative in love to be gracious toward sinners just like you. Here you are in your guilt and your lostness and your inability to save yourself, totally depraved in that sense, having nothing in you to commend yourself to God and having no ability to do anything to save yourself contrary to what some would teach, here you are ruined and guilty and helpless and dead and Scripture tells you what was true 2,000 years ago is true today. The angel tells Joseph, "This Jesus has come in order to save His people from their sins." Oh, you mean there is hope for me in my guilt and in my dead soul? You mean there is hope for forgiveness? You mean there is a way out of this dilemma in which I find myself as one guilty before God? And the resounding answer of Scripture is this: yes, yes, yes, there is. Jesus Christ came to forgive us of our sins. Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus Christ would save sinners from the judgment of God.

In Isaiah 53, why don't you turn back there with me. Isaiah 53, Isaiah, the prophet whom this passage quotes, tells us that Christ wasn't simply born, Isaiah predicted that Christ would go to suffer in a substitutionary way for sinners. In verse 4 it says, "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way." There is the universal guilt of which I have been speaking, beloved. Every one of us, you and I are included within the scope of the condemnation of that passage. Guilty. Turned away. Gone astray. "But," by contrast, there is hope. "But," by contrast God has done something, this being prophesied by Isaiah 700 years before the time of Christ saying in verse 6, "the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him."

Can we picture it this way for you, can we picture it this way? Here you are staggering under the load of guilt and sin, going through life separated from God, having no access to God, and plunging recklessly toward an eternal judgment that will not go well for you, and what does God do? He stops the staggering. He comes by the power of the Holy Spirit and brings the message of the Gospel to you just as you are hearing it today. Stops

you in your tracks and graciously lifts that load of sin off of your shoulders and places it on the shoulders of the Lord Jesus Christ at the cross of Calvary and smites him for your guilt. And Christ bears the punishment. Christ is stricken for your transgression. The punishment which your sins deserved placed on him 2,000 years before you were even born.

That's why this day matters. That's why the coming of Christ is significant. Mary's baby would become God's appointed sacrifice for our sins so that that wall of separation could be broken down; so that the great divide between you and God could be bridged; so that the barrier wall could come down; so that the dead could be brought to life; so that the blind could see; so that the deaf could hear. That's why Christ came. This passage in Matthew 1 speaks of the greatest gift that could ever be given to you. It speaks of the greatest message that you could ever hear. It speaks of the one thing that can save your soul because it points you to Jesus Christ and the reason that he came, he came to forgive our sins, and he paid the price in full at Calvary, and he invites you, my friend, my unsaved friend, he invites you in this moment, "Come to me all ye who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." The price of sin has been paid. Christ calls you to come to him by simple faith, to believe what he has said and reach out with your empty hands and say, "I receive you as that which would save me from my sin, as the one alone who can redeem me." That's why Christ came. That's the significance of Christmas. Forget the gifts. Forget Santa. Forget everything else and realize that as we remember the birth of Christ, we are remembering the initiative of God toward sinners just like you. He is gracious. He is merciful. He is willing to receive all who will come.

Go back to Matthew 1, if you would. There is a second aspect that I would have you see from this passage. Jesus came to forgive sins, secondly, as we alluded to earlier, Jesus came to fulfill prophecy. He came to fulfill prophecy. Look at verse 22 with me. Matthew 1:22, "Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet." Notice the purpose that is being spoken of here again. This took place to fulfill. This was the purpose for which all of these other things have happened. There was a purpose at stake, the purpose Jesus coming in order to forgive our sins and the angel says this is happening in order to fulfill prophecy, the purpose stated in that way.

Look at what it says, verse 22, "fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet," and then in verse 23, "'Behold, the Virgin shall be with Child and shall bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which translated means, 'God with us.'" Those of you maybe not familiar with your Bibles, like one day we hope you will be, notice the, the all caps, the use of capital letters throughout verse 23 there. That's simply an indication that the publishers use to show that an Old Testament passage is being quoted there and that Old Testament passage is found in Isaiah 7:14 which reads, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel." Friends, Isaiah made that prophecy 700 years before the birth of Christ, 700 years before today's date before now would take us back to the year 1317 before Columbus came to America. That's how many centuries are at stake to just give you a little sense of perspective. That gives you a sense of the measure of time that passed from when Isaiah made that prophecy to the coming of Christ described in

Matthew 1, centuries that far transcend the length of time our own country has been in existence. Well, that's pretty staggering. That speaks to us of a God who is sovereign over the ages, the God who is sovereign to bring his will to pass and time and the rebellion of man is no hindrance to the power of God to accomplish what he intended from the beginning of time.

The coming of Jesus was a perfect manifestation of that. Jesus' birth fulfilled that prophecy that Isaiah made. Whoever heard of a virgin giving birth to a child? Seven hundred years later, that's exactly what happened and the angel tells Joseph, "Joseph, you're on the front seat. You are an eyewitness to the fulfillment of prophecy through the birth of this baby." Well, today we look at that and we see another staggering aspect of what that means. We step back from that and we realize that this is a declaration, Matthew 1 and the birth of Christ is a declaration and an assertion of the unhindered sovereignty of God to accomplish his will. If God can declare his intentions 700 years in advance and bring them to pass in perfect detail 700 years later, you have before you a God of staggering power the likes of which you have never seen. There is no earthly king that has that power. There is no politician, there is no religious leader that has that kind of power to do anything like that. What we read in Scripture declares to us the greatness of God is shown in his ability to tell us what will happen in the future and then bring it to pass.

Jesus' birth fulfilled other prophecies as well. Micah 5:2 says that he would be born in Bethlehem. Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah 700 years before. And in Micah it is written, "From you," Bethlehem, "One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity." Micah predicted Messiah would come from Bethlehem. Do you know what? He did.

And you see, beloved, here's the thing just kind of keeping this and just trying to bridge in our collective minds between the human happiness that attends this season with the significance that is really attached to it, to realize that year to year as we remember the birth of Christ at this time, that we are having echoes, we are having an echo of the fact that there is eternal significance to what is happening and that this was planned by God before the beginning of time. Christ was the Savior slain before the foundation of the world, Scripture says. That tells you that God's will is preeminent in the outworking of time; that God is sovereign; that God is powerful; that all things are working out according to the plan that he established and that centuries are no hindrance to it. Compare that to our own weakness of purpose. You know what it's like, you set out in your mind you're going to drive home and you get a flat tire. You can't even guarantee what your life is going to be like tomorrow. God can guarantee what things are going to be like millennia from now because he sees the end from the beginning and he is in perfect control over it all.

You see, this fulfilled prophecy teaches us that God is working out his eternal plan on his timetable and, beloved, mark it well, mark it very very well deep in your souls, that even the rebellion of man cannot hinder the ultimate fulfillment of the plan of God. God is in perfect control. He directs everything to accomplish his purposes. That's great but those

of you that are in Christ, think with me in what I'm about to say. Think with me in what that means. Those of us that are in Christ, we have been reconciled to God through faith in his Son, think with me. God's plan of salvation was his eternal plan. This didn't just kind of unfold and God made it up as he went along. Time was just the outworking of what he had already determined, not God fixing things that he didn't foresee along the way. What does that mean for you, if you are in Christ here today? You know that you belong. You have been born again. God truly is your Father. Christ truly is your brother in heaven. What does that mean? What does fulfilled prophecy mean? It means nothing less than this: it means that God's loving intentions toward your soul have always been at work to secure your eternal salvation. Scripture tells us that God determined before the beginning of time who would ultimately be his and Christ came in order to save those people that he had chosen, and if you are one of them, it means that God's purposes throughout the millennia have always been at work and there was never a moment in time ever, there has never ever ever ever ever ever been an instant in the mind of God where your eternal salvation was somehow absent from his thoughts. His perfect mind, his perfect omniscience, his divine power has always been at work to make sure that the salvation of his people would most certainly come to pass and that's not simply a general lump of mass of people to be figured out later in time, God knew you by name before the beginning of time. God chose you by name before the beginning of time. Christ died for you by name at the cross. And that tells us that we rest in a divine salvation of infinite power, of infinite purpose, that can never fail, and that the outworking of time for all of its infinite complexity and myriad upon myriad upon myriad of different details and people and all that that God is in control of, that there was never a moment in time where you were not present in his thoughts, where you were not the object of his saving intention.

Fulfilled prophecy shows you that. Beloved, if you would think on that and meditate on that as a Christian, it would transform your life. It would put away all of your questionings of God and the purposes, "Why God this? Why did God do that? Why did this sad thing happen? Why did this broken thing come to my life?" Those things are difficult and we grieve with those who grieve but, beloved, hear me as I speak: those things get swallowed up by a greater reality; those things get swallowed up when you realize that God has always been at work in order to secure your eternal salvation and to make sure that you would ultimately be safely delivered into his kingdom in heaven where you would never be lost ever, where you would never suffer again, where every tear would be wiped away. The greatness of the love of God, the greatness of the power of God, the greatness of the purpose of God for your eternal soul, that, meditation on that brings you to love and worship and praise in confidence and serenity and peace no matter what else may befall you in life. You step back from it all and you wipe the tears out of your eyes and you say, "Whatever else I say about this life, it's well with my soul and I am content and I am at peace with a holy God, based on an initiative that Jesus Christ took to forgive my sins and to fulfill prophecy. And he included me by name in his plans. Praise be to that gracious Christ."

Well, who is this Jesus that saves us? Point 3 here this morning: Jesus came in the fullness of deity. He came in the fullness of deity. We said that Jesus came to forgive our

sins, Jesus came to fulfill prophecy, and thirdly we see that Jesus came in the fullness of deity. This God who fulfills prophecy is the same God who was with us in the manger.

Look at verse 23, "'Behold, the Virgin shall be with Child and shall bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which translates d means, 'God with us.' And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus." Beloved, look at verse 23 with me. What is his name? His name is Immanuel. What does Immanuel mean? It means God with us. Do you know what that means? Do you realize the significance of that statement in light of the other things that this passage has taught us? It means that the God who existed before time began, the God who planned out this plan of eternal salvation of which we have been speaking, the God sovereign over time and nations, the God who is able to fulfill prophecy down to the letter, is the same God who was with us in the manger. There is only one God and it is that God, specifically the second person of that one Godhead, the Triune Godhead, who came to earth, who was born to Mary. Her baby was God in human flesh. Mary's baby was her own Creator. Mary's baby was the one who formed her brain.

John 1:1, the Gospel of John says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Verse 14 says, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." The Word was God, the Word became flesh. That's who we are talking about here. Colossians 2:9 says, "in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." This God who planned prophecy in its fulfillment is the same God who was with us in the manger.

Theologians have a lot of terms that they like to use. They are good to know. They use the term Incarnation to talk about what we are addressing here this morning. Incarnation is the idea that Jesus was God in human flesh. He took on human flesh and here's what that means, step back and breathe in the fresh air. To be here in Scripture, to be here in this mental realm, to be here in this spiritual realm, is to be standing on a mountaintop of clear view, of clear air of spectacular freshness; clean, fresh, spiritual air to breathe in in the midst of all of the calamity and darkness of our world. What does this all mean? It means this: it means that the holy God has visited his people. Incarnation means that God walked on his own creation. Incarnation means that God had visited his people in the most personal and tangible way possible. He came to earth where we live. He walked on the same ground that we walk on. He breathed the same air that we did and do.

Jesus came to forgive our sins, he came to fulfill prophecy, and he came in the fullness of deity. You know, there are heretical groups, there are false teachers who have abounded through the ages since the coming of Christ, who diminish Christ and say like the Jehovah's Witnesses say, he was a God not God himself. They have the idea that maybe Jesus was the first creation of God and then he did everything else. That ain't true and that's a hill worth dying on. Think about it with me this way. There are a lot of things to be said about that but if the one true God, if, this is a contrary to fact statement, if the one true God simply made another being and sent him to earth, there is no sacrifice on God's part. There is no real condescension on God's part. He just made up a proxy and let the

proxy do all the hard work for him and God stands remote and removed and distant from the whole situation. That's not true. That's not what the Bible presents at all. The reality of the Incarnation is far greater than that. God himself became a man. God himself condescended. God himself stepped down from heaven to come to this earth, leaving the glory of heaven, leaving the adoring worship of angels in order to come down and walk amongst knuckleheads like you and me.

Why would he do that? What kind of humility is that? What kind of self-denial is that? What kind of majesty is that, that the one true God would do that? Do you see how worthy of your faith Jesus Christ is? Do you see how worthy of your love Jesus Christ is? Do you see how worthy of majesty and fear and devotion and adoration Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone is? Who does that? What king abandons his throne in order to suffer for the people over whom he rules? There is no king like that but one. The Lord Jesus Christ is that King and that's what we remember in this time of year, God with us, the Lord Jesus Christ acting to deliver us from sin and Satan.

The Son of God humbled himself to meet our need. That's why good Bible teachers will tell you that you can't speak of Christmas and stop at the manger. You can't look at the manger, you can't look at the birth of Christ in isolation without considering what came before it and what came after it. What came before it was the plan of God where prophecies pointed to this day. There was an eternal context to his birth and then you follow his life all the way through, you realize the purpose for which he came, the purpose was to go to the cross. The purpose in his Incarnation, he was born to suffer, he was born to die for sinners like you. This is majestic. We lose the capacity of human language. Human language comes up to the shores of the greatness of these things of which we speak but it can't go further into the ocean and explore the depths of it. It's just too much because after the birth, after the manger came a death at the cross where Jesus underwent that sacrificial death to pay the price for sin is just like you.

What great salvation is this, my friend? How wonderful is this message? Words can't describe it, can they? There is no tongue sufficient to declare it. There is a reason that the hymn writer said, "I wish I had a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise," because he felt hindered by the limitations of just one. He knew that just one wasn't enough. You know, hymn writers have expressed the greatness of this in other ways as well. A hymn writer said, "Were the whole realm of nature mine. If I owned the whole world, if I owned the universe and I offered that to God in grateful thanks for what Christ did, it wouldn't be enough." How can you measure in terms of human value, in terms of material things, the infinite worth of the spiritual gift that Jesus Christ gave to you when he saved your soul? The consequences of that are infinite. This material world is finite and it's all going to burn up. If we had everything, beloved, if we had 10,000 tongues it would not be enough to extol the virtue of Christ.

So I ask you: do you know this Christ? Have you come to him in brokenness of heart over your sin? Have you forsaken any sense that you deserve salvation? Have you forsaken any claim to your own goodness? Have you forsaken any claim to spiritual perfection of any kind and simply come to God as a bankrupt sinner in need of salvation

and put your faith in Christ alone to save you? Is your heart as divided and imperfect as it still is, as mine is? Does your heart see in Christ the Lily of the Valley, the Rose of Sharon, the most beautiful thing of them all? Do you see Christ as worth more than anything this world has to offer? Is Christ more dear to you than your dearest human relation, I ask you? That's what he deserves. That's the place the truly redeemed heart gives to him. Is that your heart here as we sit here today? Is there awe, is there fear, is there reverence in your heart for him that doesn't trifle with the Gospel message and says this is the dearest thing of my heart? Christ is more dear to me than anything else?

Turn to the Gospel of John 1 as we close and let's just lay it out and make it really plain and simple. There are two basic responses to Jesus Christ. Really, there are really only two. They manifest themselves in different ways but there are only two: you either reject Christ or you receive him. There is nothing else. Look at John 1:11, "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." You see, it's not by works, it's by believing in Christ. It's not by spiritual perfection, it's by faith in one who acted on your behalf. So I ask you, are you among those who have rejected him, who have not received him?

Beloved, let me tell you something really important that you really need to nail down as we close here this morning. You really need to get this. Young men, young women, old men, old women, you really need to get this: rejection of Christ does not have to be a violent hatred like those that called for his crucifixion. They violently hated him. That's one way to reject him but rejection can also be simply through a passive indifference, "I don't need this. I don't care about this. Leave me alone. I'm going to go my own way." No violence in that toward Christ but it's a rejection all the same, it's a refusal to receive him. A condescending dismissal, "Oh, I've heard this all before. I don't need this. I don't want this. I don't care. That's good for you. I don't need that. I'm glad you have religion, that's not for me." Condescension dripping all along. It can be the rejection of religion saying, "I'll do my thing. I'll do it my way, and I think by doing what I do, God will find me good enough." No, it doesn't work that way. The only people that go to heaven, beloved, are those who come to Christ empty-handed and say, "I need a Savior. Would you please save me? By faith I receive you," and I ask you whether you have received him like that. You must put your personal faith in Christ in order to be saved.

So in this great season that lots of people like, forget what the culture is saying, forget all of the other trappings of the moment and realize that Christ invites you to himself. "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Have you responded to that promise from the lips of Christ?

Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, we are in awe of the greatness of the Incarnation. We are in awe that you left the throne of heaven in order to save a people for yourself. But we are especially in awe that you would choose to include any of us in that saving mission. There was nothing good in us. What is there in a spiritual corpse to attract your attention? What is there in

a child of Satan to attract the Son of God? No, we were on the receiving end of a divine initiative, a divine love. You took the initiative toward us. We love you only because you first loved us. We honor you and praise you as the King and the Captain of our salvation, the Captain of our souls, our brother in heaven who intercedes and hears us now as we pray. Thank you for that. Show mercy to those who are here who have not received you by faith. Father, stir in their dead hearts the motions of life that they might rise, come forth and receive Christ for their salvation. May each one under the sound of my voice, Father, ultimately be found around the throne of Christ in heaven forever rejoicing in this great salvation which was encapsulated in the passage that we have just seen. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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