

What's To Celebrate? His Greatness Meets Our Plights.

Today, we want to examine not the facts, those you know, but the meaning and significance of Christ's coming.

I also want to point out to you that what we celebrate at Christmas meets real and deep problems and needs in our lives. I have pointed to that idea in my sub-title, His Greatness Meets our Plights. A plight is "a situation, especially a bad or unfortunate one."

You may have a plight or need this very Christmas morning.

I pray that God would meet you in your needs and plights in these moments ahead.

Christmas is a celebration of a bounty of solutions... solutions for our broken bodies, our broken lives, our broken physical planet, and our broken world.

Yet, Christmas is often bitter-sweet for this very reason. It is an irony that as we celebrate Christ's coming that we often grieve over that which Christ came to fix because it is not fully fixed yet. The Bible is honest to tell us that.

As we gather with family and friends, we are reminded that things are not as we long for, are not as they once were, and are not as they will be.

To borrow a current book and film metaphor of C.S. Lewis', there was a previous time when there was no Christmas, when it was only winter.

It is good and accurate now that Christmas comes only as a short time in the winter. There will not always be winter with a short Christmas. There will yet be a time when every day is festive, joyful, and warm Christmas... forever, in the coming, conquering kingdom of the Lamb.

So, we want to talk about how Christmas has now come to us this morning and what it all means.

But why are we having to even talk about what Christmas means?

Do we really need to rehearse again why Christmas is worth celebrating?

Well, yes we do. It seems that there is a war ongoing against Christmas.

John Gibson, one of the FOX News Channel's anchors had a new book out for the Christmas season this year. Perhaps you've heard of it. It's called "The War on Christmas: How the Liberal Plot to Ban the Sacred Christian Holiday Is Worse Than You Thought". I understand what Mr. Gibson is pointing out. But if I read my church history right, I don't think you can ban Christmas. Once Christ comes, nobody has been able to stop Christmas yet.

The only folks that profoundly diminish the celebration of Christmas is the Church, you and me. The REAL war being waged against Christmas is between false meanings and false idolatries of Christmas and the biblical ones. And the combatants are less the culture versus Christians, but Christians against our own idolatries. Perhaps you remember that cartoonist Walt Kelly through the character Pogo said, "Yep, son, we have met the enemy and he is us."

Whether we just forget the biblical reasons for Christmas or whether we allow the false idols of our age, like materialism or stuffism and the drive for personal autonomy, that is, not willing to be accountable to anyone at anytime over anything, whether we allow these idols to become intertwined in our Christmas

meanings like Kudzu, this is where the real war against Christmas is fought. So let's remind ourselves this morning on what the Bible says we have to celebrate and how these expressions of God's love meet real needs in our lives.

I have chosen three different texts today that focus on what the Bible says about why God the Son, came to us.

And here are my points written in your bulletin:

- One, Revelational Love dispels our curiosity, ignorance, & longings
- Two, Covenantal Love breaks through the loneliness of abandonment
- Three, Holy Love solves our self-afflicted & unfixable folly & rebellion

Point 1: Revelational Love dispels our curiosity, ignorance, & longings

Do you know the quotation of Blaise Pascal, the French Mathematician, Philosopher and Physicist who lived in the early part of the 17th century...

"There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus".

Pascal is arguing that since God made us in His image as His creatures that we have a ferocious curiosity that encompasses our whole being, our minds and our hearts.

The first two chapters of Paul's letter to the Romans explains to us that we learn of God externally through His creation and internally through the conscience.

Romans 1:19ff:

"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

Romans 2:14ff

"For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."

You see we both know some things about God from His creation and we have a moral compass, a conscience, that points to God and His laws which fires our longings to know Him. In fact, much of our activity is seeking to fill this longing void with things and other people.

But as good as this general revelation of God is, it has been bested by a more thorough and profound revelation of God with even greater benefits.

And that is part of what Christmas is about... seeing God in the flesh.

The Christmas story according to John is found in Chapter 1. If you have your Bible, turn with me there and let's read verses 1 - 18.

John gives us no historical details like Luke, but chooses to state what he sees as the significance of Christ's coming.

And as we read this, think about our human needs and your own personal need to know about God. I'm reading from the English Standard Version. Hear God's Word.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."

So the apostle John says to us that the big deal about our Christmas celebration is that God the Father has revealed Himself to us in full humanity in Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity.

Listen to the writer of book of Hebrews, Chapter 1, verse 1 and following:

"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power."

God has demonstrated His profound love for us by revealing Himself intimately in someone exactly like us.

Did God have to become like us in Jesus in order to understand us?

No, He became one of us, not to understand us, but for us to understand Him and what He is like... that He is full of grace and truth, full of uncompromising and overcoming light.

And when He shatters our curiosity and ignorance and longing for a Messiah to finally come, how did we respond? We rejected His revelation, Him.

It is interesting that the apostle John can't hold back from telling us even at the very beginning of His Gospel what our response was: "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him."

We celebrate Christmas according to John because in His love for us God has made Himself fully known in Jesus of Nazareth.

Point 2: Covenantal Love breaks through the loneliness of abandonment

Loneliness is a universal condition... something we all wrestle with. Perhaps, the most painful form of loneliness is when we feel that we have been abandoned by someone... cast aside or worse just forgotten from apathy.

And perhaps the worse form of abandonment is when we feel that God has abandoned us. When his presence seems and feels an entire universe away. Sometimes we don't know what we've done and sometimes we know our own sin has us so guilty and so shameful that God is justified to abandon us. But that would be a world where it is always winter for us, and never Christmas.

Can you imagine living in the days before Jesus' birth? The last word from God was 400 years ago when Malachi spoke of a prophet who would come and herald the arrival of the Messiah.

Where is God? Is God great enough that He can come? Is God good enough that He cares about us, even us who deserve to be abandoned?

I can imagine how I as a Jewish man living in that time I might give up and feel abandoned by God. Are you lonely this morning, feeling abandoned by God?

Turn to Luke 1 and let's read what is called "Zechariah's Song", verses 67-79. You will remember that Zechariah was John the Baptist's father, a priest, whose mouth had been shut by the angel Gabriel because he did not believe Gabriel when he told him that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son named John who would prepare the people of Israel for the Lord.

In verses 67-79 of Luke 1 after John's birth, Zechariah's tongue is loosed and by now it turns out he has quite a bit to say:

His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come and has redeemed his people.
He has raised up a horn[d] of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David
(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us—
to show mercy to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God,

by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

What did you hear in this passage?

Did you hear the proclamation of a God who is so great, whose mercies are so tender, so capable that He never fails to keep a promise or a a covenant that He has made.

“to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”

What kind of love always keeps a promise? A infinitely great love, a beautiful and powerful love.
Hebrews 13, verses 5& 6

“Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”

Evidently, Covenantal Love not only breaks through the loneliness of abandonment but also is a antidote to the poison of the idolatry of stuffism, one of the false idols of our age and every age.

We need not be lonely. We have not been abandoned. He kept His promise.
He came for us. He came for me and you.
Let us celebrate His Covenantal Love at Christmas.

Point 3: Holy Love solves our self-afflicted & unfixable folly & rebellion

Now let’s turn to and read Matthew 1:18-23:

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).”

In speaking to Joseph, of all the qualifications that the angel of the Lord could have given, what is the brief, earth-shaking reason the angel gives Joseph about why the Second person of the Godhead has come to earth?

“for he will save his people from their sins.”

Christmas is most centrally about solving my problem and your problem with sin. What's the problem with sin? The problem is that there is no known human cure for the wrath of God against the violation of His laws. There is no known cure for the horrendous consequences that our sin does to ourselves, and to each other, and to even God's creation. And this monstrous problem starts with just one sin against a perfectly good and righteous God.

James, the brother of Jesus tells us in James 2:10 that "whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."

Sin is mankind's worst and total catastrophe. Sin is my personal moral nightmare of nightmares and train wreck of train wrecks and it is yours... every person's in this room this morning.

With one sin, I become guilty and shameful, and there is no human-made cure. None.

Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas, indeed.

"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God." (Romans 5:6-11)

Jesus said: "... the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:26-28)

And this one you know well:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Holy Love.

The word "holy" means literally "separate", that is to say, completely different than us. God's love is so great, so fundamentally beyond our ability and our comprehension that we call it and Him, "holy".

While I am still a rebel, Christ has come to die for me and to secure peace for me with God by substituting His perfect life for my rebellious one. Christ tells me that if I will trust that His death has secured this peace with God that I will have eternal life and join Him in heaven. How do you and I do that?

Paul says in Romans 10:9 and following"

"... if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." So if I acknowledge and understand this truth - that Jesus is the Lord and His death can reconcile me with God starting with my mind. Then, if I trust it with my heart as if it were a chair that I'm going to sit in and trust it will hold me, this is believing faith... and finally with my will, I decide that I will live according to Jesus' pattern of living, submit to His authority, and let go of my past sinful commitments, that's called repentance, a change of mind and heart and will that results in a change of behaviour.

That is how I became, that is how anyone can and anyone in this room this morning becomes a Christian.

If you have not taken these steps and if this is where your mind, heart, and will are this morning, then I would urge you to talk to God today about it, and then talk to someone here and tell them what you have done.

So what does the Scripture tell us about the meaning of Christmas?

First, Christmas is about Jesus, the Second Person of the Godhead coming to reveal the Father in a tangible, human way that we have seen with our eyes and touched with our hands via the apostles. He loves us in Jesus by revealing Himself which answers many of my curiosities, clears up my ignorances, and satisfies many of my longings for Him.

Second, it is about a supreme being so great, so magnificent that He never, ever, on any occasion, does not fulfill a promise to those He has made one and He has made some amazing ones to us that He has already kept because with God, a covenant is a covenant is a covenant. He will never abandon me or you.

And finally and centrally, Christmas is about solving the world's worst, meanest, most disastrous problem, sin. "And you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins".

And what makes Christmas merry and happy and wonderful this very morning, December 25, 2005, is that His coming can change our lives for all eternity.

And if and when that happens, there will be a day in the days to come for you and me, when there will be no more winter, but only and always Christmas.

Let's pray together.

Triune God, thank you for revealing yourself to us, for keeping your covenant with us the promise-breakers, and for the giving of yourself by perfect life and redeeming death and resurrection that we might be reconciled with you over our sins and enjoy peace with the One who has made us.

Give grace Lord to anyone here this morning seeking you.

And as we celebrate your first coming this morning Jesus, please come to us soon even quicker. We love you.

In celebration of Jesus, Amen.

Let's conclude our worship of the Living God who has revealed Himself in the Saviour Jesus by standing and singing Number 565, "All for Jesus"
(Trinity Hymnal).

Now receive God's benediction:

"Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."