

**+ Luke 2:6-12 + Born to Save Us¹ +
+ Festival of the Nativity of Our Lord: Christmas Day + 25 December 2013 +**

Have you ever thought about why children are born? Back in the day, parents had a bunch of kids because it meant more helpers on the farm or workers in the home. Today parents might think about having someone to love and care for so they might have someone to love and care for them when they're old. Maybe they're looking for someone to be there for their other kids as a playmate and companion. If you go to any youth sporting events, it always seems like there are some parents who had their kids because they wanted to live vicariously through their children and win the championship they were never quite able to win when they were young. There are a lot of possible answers to that question why a particular baby was born.

For good reason, then, there's always something about a birth that's exciting. It's a completely new start. Some of that excitement comes from the fact that we see that child so full of potential. This could be the child who will cure cancer, or be a great president, or create the next great masterpiece in art or music. This could be a child who will be great in so many different ways. Do you know what I'm talking about? Those of you who have kids—why did you have yours? Those of you who are or were kids—why were you born?

I suppose we could each interview our parents on that one, but even if they did admit their thinking, we really wouldn't get the answer. After all, our parents can't really take responsibility for giving us life. That credit ultimately goes to our gracious and almighty God. So why did God put you here? Go back to the first human life he made. He said why he did it. God had a conversation with himself in Genesis 1(:26): ***"Let us make man in our image, in our likeness."***

God—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—made you, gave you life to be like God—perfect, to be with God and live with him forever in total joy and peace and perfection—to be a holy companion for a holy God. Now that's a noble purpose for a birth, isn't it?

...But there's a problem. That whole "Image of God" thing didn't last very long. God made Adam and Eve, gave them the Garden of Eden, really gave them everything. He also gave them one command and told them that the wages of sin was death. Well, they didn't trust him to know what was good for them and they ate of that forbidden fruit. They doubted God's love and brought sin and death on themselves and every other person since. They ruined their perfection and ability to be with a holy God...and yours.

That's a problem we've inherited, isn't it? It's a problem we've perpetuated, we've continued and passed on, haven't we? God made us to be perfect. You were born to be his companion, and, well, even on such a holy day, I'm pretty sure you probably wouldn't pick the word "holy" to describe getting you and your family ready to come here and making it on time last night and all the other preparations you made for yesterday and today. You probably wouldn't use the word "holy" to describe your short fuse with the kids or your spouse or the internal complaining about *having* to go to church on Christmas morning in the snow and the cold and church is chilly too... I don't have to do much convincing, do I? We aren't holy. We aren't living up to our purpose, the reason for which we were born. Then add to that all the times we go in the completely opposite direction and do exactly what God tells us not to do. Now think about what all that means for your relationship with God.

More disappointing than the kid who doesn't win the championship for his father who never grew out of his teenage glory years, more crushing than the kid who rebels against her parents and ends up in jail, worse than any kid failing to meet the expectations of their earthly parents—our failures mean we don't meet God's demands. Our sins earned death. They earned separation from our holy God forever.

That, my friends, is why Christmas is such a big deal. It's a big deal because it's the day God's Son was born into our world. The holy Maker and Preserver of the universe sent his one and only Son. God came to earth. The Lord of free and faithful grace, who holds the planets in their courses and the stars in their places, left behind the eternal glory of heaven to become our Substitute, to become so weak and fragile that he couldn't walk or talk or even hold his head up. God became a human being, and that's mind blowing.

...But this birth is an even bigger deal because of its purpose. This child was born not to win a state championship or cure cancer, not to fix hunger or end war, but to cure sin—the cause of it all. God's presence with us would not emphasize the gulf between him and us, but would actually cross it.

God became a human being. He wasn't born in the palace of Caesar Augustus, because he wasn't born to rule. He wasn't born in the lap of luxury, because the purpose of his birth was not to be treated as he deserved.

¹ Many of the thoughts and language of this sermon were received with thanks from a Christmas sermon by Rev. Jonathan Scharf.

He was born in a village called Bethlehem, because that's what was promised through the prophets, to a descendant of Adam and Abraham and David, because God had said that's whom he would send. He was born and placed in a manger, because he came to suffer, not show off. God himself was wrapped in cloths and laid down to sleep in a feeding trough among the smells of manure and dirt, all because of why he was born.

Jesus was born to save us. He was born to take our place and feel the pain our mistakes caused. He was born to do what we are too weak to do—obey the law. He was born to pay for the times we don't. He was born to die.

...And every detail in Luke 2 proclaims that. The God, who plays kings and emperors like pawns on a chess board, had mighty Caesar move the world's population with a census. That's how Micah's little prophecy of the Savior would be fulfilled and David's greatest descendant would be born in Bethlehem. That's the kind of power this helpless baby gave up to be born into our world. Even with that great family name, God sent his Son to some of David's poorest children, who couldn't even afford a lamb to dedicate him at the temple, who couldn't even afford a room the night he was born, all so that what he said through the ancient prophet Isaiah (53:2) would be true: ***"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him."***

Then look at how simply his birth is described: ***"While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born and [Mary] gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."*** Such simple words, such a simple scene, foreshadowing another scene 33 years later as this baby's grown, helpless body was carried from the cross, wrapped in linen cloths, and placed in a borrowed bed—the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

You see, this child was born to die. Even his birth announcement points to that purpose. If you skip ahead to verse 11, the angel tells the shepherds, ***"Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ (God's promised One) the Lord (God himself)."*** Now check out the sign of God's coming. ***"This will be the sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*** The sign that your Savior is here is that God so humbled himself. The sign isn't some grand glorious display of power and might, but cloths and a borrowed bed. That's the sign that this Child was born to die, because that is what it took to save us.

We've tried so many ways to deal with our own failures from denying them, to trying to blame someone else for them, making excuses and every rationalization for them, but our efforts don't work. Even trying our best to be good can't fix our sin problem. Remember, we were born to be perfect, to live with God forever, but we aren't. That's why Christmas happened. This baby was born to rescue us from what our sins had coming, to deliver us from the guilt and shame and junk that our mistakes bring into our lives. Jesus was born to save us from guilt and worry and fear and death and ultimately, hell.

So let's go back to where we started. Why were you born? Here...to your parents...into this world? Well, all the details of your birth would say you were born to die. That was the price tag hanging over you, but God's love changed that. Christmas changed that. This baby, God's Son, the sinless, perfect Son of the virgin was born to die in your place so you would live, so you would be reborn and live forever, so your guilt would be gone, so you would be perfectly suited to live with your God for all eternity. You were born to live because this Child was born to save you and me, to save us. Now that's a birth worth celebrating, isn't it? So let's celebrate that birth today and always. My friends, Merry Christmas! Amen.