

December 24, 2013
Christmas is Not Your Birthday

The Difference a Baby Makes
Luke 2:1-20

Opening Words: There are 365 days each year, but Christmas day is special. What is there not to love? Our favorite Christmas cookies tempt us for weeks. Our community is illuminated with Christmas lights. Our Christmas trees are decorated with ornaments that remind us of the past. Our calendars are filled with Christmas parties and our Christmas wish list contains the desires of our heart. Christmas is a time of family and friends. It is easy to forget that Christmas is a time to remember the birth of Jesus.

This is Christmas Eve, and I am going to conclude my 2013 Advent sermon series, *Christmas is Not Your Birthday*. The goal in this entire sermon series has been to help you push away all the trappings of this month so you can remember the true meaning of Christmas. Our scripture lesson for this evening comes as no surprise. We hear these words annually, and you would be disappointed if you didn't hear them this evening. May God give you ears to hear this sacred text, Luke 2:1-20. Let me call this message *The Difference a Baby Makes*.

Luke 2:1-20 ¹ In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Have you heard the news? It's a boy! The announcement was made on July 22, 2013. He was born in London at 4:24 in the afternoon. He weighed in at 8 pounds, 8 ounces. It really is an amazing piece of history. Just think about it. At this moment, there are four living British monarchs. Everyone was thrilled when the birth was announced. The baby's great-grandmother, Queen Elizabeth, was thrilled. The baby's grandfather, Prince Charles, was thrilled. Obviously, the baby's parents, Prince William and Catherine, were thrilled. The entire country of Great Britain was thrilled. It seemed like the entire western world was thrilled. They named him George Alexander Louis. God willing, in time, he will be called King George VII. You know it is true. The addition of a baby changes everything!

Have you heard the news? I am going to be a grandfather. I know what you are thinking. How can that possibly be true? I am far too young. People may think I am her older brother (ha ha). However, it is true, and Kathryn and I are going to be grandparents and we couldn't be more pleased. If everything goes as planned, she will be born in April. (There is a part of me that wants to blow through Christmas and head straight for Easter.) I can tell you already, my granddaughter is a fortunate little girl because she is going to have some wonderful parents. Do I have to say it? Do I really have to say it? The addition of a baby changes everything!

Have you heard the news? It's a boy. The announcement came in our Gospel lesson for this evening. You know the story. There was a young woman by the name of Mary. In her world, life began young because it ended early. How old was Mary? My guess is fifteen. Her world saw her as nice and respectable. However, God saw more. I have no clue how many women have ever lived in the history of the world, but God chose her to be the mother of His son. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary and she conceived. Her pregnancy not only changed her life; it complicated her life. She would need some earthly help, and that help came in the form of Joseph. When he married Mary, he did not just sign up to help raise another man's son. He signed up to help raise the son of God. According to the text, after nine months of pregnancy, including a seventy-mile donkey ride between Mary's hometown and Joseph's hometown, Nazareth and Bethlehem, the baby was born. The baby was a boy and they named him Jesus. Mary's baby changed everything!

Did you know that on an average day, 370,000 babies are born each day in the world? During the years 2011 to 2013, approximately 134 million babies were born annually in

the world. Approximately four million babies are born in America each year. That is a lot of babies, but Mary's baby was different. Jesus was the only baby of divine origin. Jesus was the incarnation of God. In other words, Jesus was God! Just ponder that fact for a moment. God left the perfection of heaven to enter this imperfect world. It is more than the human mind can handle. Augustine said, *"The incarnation of God is beyond all human understanding."* He came because of his great love for us. However, you will not fully understand the depth of that love until you realize the baby born in the manger is the man who died on the cross. The baby we remember this evening changed everything!

Why is the birth of Jesus so important? What did Jesus change? There are many things, but I only have time for three. First, the birth of Jesus exposed **God's heart**. Second, the birth of Jesus revealed our greatest **human need**. Third and finally, the birth of Jesus is the origin of our **divine purpose**. Those are the three things I want to look at this evening. I promise to be brief. So if you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

God's Heart

The birth of Jesus demonstrated the depth of God's love for you and me. In other words, Jesus exposed God's heart. He wasn't satisfied studying us from heaven. God chose to enter this world and become one of us. John 3:16-17 says, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."* God came into the world to tell us that He loves you and me!

The great Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard told the story of a prince who was running an errand for his father one day in the local village. As he did so, he passed through a very poor section of the town. Looking through the window of his carriage, he saw a beautiful young peasant girl walking along the street. It was love at first sight. He could not forget her. He returned to come to the town, day after day, just to see her. His heart yearned for her, but there was a problem. How could he develop a relationship with her? He was the prince and she was a peasant. He could order her to marry him. It was within his power to do so. But he wanted this girl to love him from the heart, willingly. He could put on his royal garments and impress her with his regal entourage, and drive up to her front door with soldiers and a carriage drawn by six horses. But if he did this, he would never be certain that the girl loved him, or was simply overwhelmed with his power, position and wealth. The prince came up with another solution. He moved into the village dressed only as a peasant. He lived among the people, shared their interests and concerns, and talked their language. In time, the young peasant girl grew to know him, and then to love him. In time, they married. That is the story of Christmas!

The incarnation reveals to us the very heart of God. The God of the universe is in love with you! He could have ordered us to love him. He could have impressed us with his

power. He did neither. Instead, he entered into the world to become one of us! And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" The baby Jesus changed everything!

Human Need

The birth and mission of Jesus revealed our greatest human need. Our greatest human need is forgiveness. Romans 5:8 says, "*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" Never forget, you can't earn your salvation. Our only hope of salvation is Jesus!

Someone once wrote these memorable words:

If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator;
If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist;
If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist;
If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer;
But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior.

That means you can't save yourself by taking in your neighbor's trash can. That means you can't save yourself by preparing a casserole for a sick friend. Thank means you can't save yourself by putting your loose change in the bucket by the bell ringer. You can't earn your salvation by attending a Christmas Eve service. Your only hope of salvation is Jesus. Let me ask you this all important question on this Christmas Eve. Do you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior? I hope your answer is yes! If you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, say, "**Amen!**" The baby Jesus changed everything!

Divine Purpose

The birth of Jesus is the origin of your divine purpose. How much do you appreciate Jesus dying for your sins? 1 Timothy 3:16 says, "*Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.*" I love that verse because it shows the difference Jesus has made in our world. The question is, how much of a difference has Jesus made in your life?

There is only one week left in 2013. It has been a good year for our church. We have made progress in several areas, but one thing stands out. The progress we have made in our youth program is truly amazing. One man made this possible, Nate Schott. I am confident God has something special in mind for him in the future, but we owe him a great deal today. As a pastor, it is rewarding to walk into the fellowship hall on Wednesday evenings and look at all the young faces. I don't know some of them because the group is growing. It is fun to watch them enjoy one another, and it is more impressive to watch them pray. God is cultivating leaders in our very midst.

Two weeks ago, I walked into the fellowship hall and was greeted by some smiling faces. We talked for a few seconds and I headed back to my office. A young woman followed me. She chattered as we walked, until we got into my office.

She looked at me and said, "Russ, can I ask you a question?" I said, "Sure." I didn't know what she was going to ask. I don't want to sound critical, but when adults ask me a question, it is normally very small and narrow, such as: "Do you know who didn't lock the church last night?" "Do you know who didn't turn the light off in the bathroom?" "Do you know who left their food in the refrigerator?" Or, "Do you know who didn't clean the kitchen?" Young people don't ask those kinds of questions because they don't care about those things. This lovely, bright young woman asked me a big question. She looked at me and asked, "Russ, what is the purpose of life?" If she would have asked you that question, how would you answer? I answered her question with these words, "The purpose of life is to glorify God!"

What is your purpose? What a difference a baby makes! If you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then you know two things. First, you know you are going to heaven. Thirty-three years after his birth, Jesus died so we could live. Jesus did all the work. Your salvation is the greatest gift you will ever receive. Second, as a person of integrity, you are going to find a new way every day to thank God for saving your soul. Your purpose is not your vocation. Your purpose is your testimony. What have you done lately to thank God for your salvation? We are to be practicing today what we are going to do in heaven for eternity. If that makes you think, say, "**Amen!**" The baby Jesus changed everything! Let me end with these words.

Have you heard the news? It's a girl! Reality star Kim Kardashian and rapper Kanye West named their daughter North West. She was born on June 15, 2013, and all the "Keeping Up with the Kardashians" fans and Kanye West fans were thrilled. You know it is true. Every baby makes a difference. Carl Sandberg once said, "*A baby is God's opinion that the world should go on.*" However, the birth of Jesus was different.

He changed everything. First, the baby Jesus exposed the heart of God. He became one of us. Second, the birth and mission of Jesus revealed our greatest human need, forgiveness. He is our only hope of salvation. Third and finally, the baby Jesus is the origin of our divine purpose, glorifying God! Charles Dickens once wrote, "*It is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty founder was a child himself.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"