

## **Introduction**

Just about everybody everywhere in America celebrates Christmas. The theme song for many is this:

It's the most wonderful time of the year            With the kids jingle belling  
And everyone telling you "Be of good cheer"

It's the hap-happiest season of all  
With those holiday greetings and gay happy meetings  
When friends come to call

There'll be parties for hosting            Marshmallows for toasting  
And caroling out in the snow and so on . . .

Those things are all fine and good. But for most, Christmas has nothing to do with Christ. Meanwhile, many of those who do recognize the birth of Jesus and make it part of their celebrating tend to celebrate his birth as though the birth of Christ is the be-all end-all of what we are celebrating. But truth be told, the birth of Christ is just the beginning of what is important about his earthly ministry.

The birth of Jesus is truly awesome. The nature of this baby whose birth we celebrate is mind-boggling. One of the three persons who are eternal God became flesh. He was conceived in a human womb. And he was born. He was born to live. He humbled himself to become a human and to live among sinful humans revealing the glory of God. In Christ we have beheld one who obeys the Father perfectly without a single spot. So we have a perfect example of how we ought to live. But again, the life Jesus lived is just the tip of the iceberg. Our series this month is "Christ was born for this." Last week we directed our attention on the fact that Christ was born to live. This morning we move deeper to examine the fact that Christ was born to die.

[Read Text and Pray]

I preached on this very text earlier this year. So it is not my purpose this morning to expound on all the details of the text. I am going to focus on that part which helps us see the connection between the birth of Jesus and his death. And that part is the name he was to be given and the reason for it.

## **I. The Command Given by the Angel**

Joseph received a strong and straightforward directive from the angel. When the child was born, he was to name him Jesus.

A. In the Scripture, names are important. It is really striking that among the first tasks God gave to Adam in the Garden of Eden was the privilege of naming the livestock and the birds and the beasts of the field. And when God brought to Adam his newly formed wife, Adam named her woman with a reason: because she was taken out of man. Then in Genesis 3, Adam gave the woman another name. The man called his wife's name Eve because she was the mother of all the living. There is intentionality to these names. There must have been the same approach in his naming the animals.

B. God takes the same approach. He gives names that are expressive of the significance of the person. There are numerous names of God. He chose them intentionally to express who he is. And here with the command of the angel, we see He selected the name of his only true son because it tells us who he is. You shall call his name him Jesus, said the angel. The name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew Joshua or Yeshua. It consists of two concepts merged together. It combines a short form of the name of the Lord with the act of saving and delivering. The Lord saves or the Lord delivers. Jesus is the deliverance of the Lord.

## **II. The Explanation Given by the Angel**

A. The Hebrew name Eve means "life" or "living," and Adam gave her this name for a reason. She was the mother of all the living. Likewise, the angel said to Joseph, you shall call his name "The Lord Saves" for a reason. He will save his people from their sins. The name is intentional; the name means something. It demonstrates what is at the heart of who this person is. Central to the identity of this baby who would be born is this: he will

save his people from their sins. Christ was born for this. He was born to save his people from their sins.

B. This explanation does two things. It points to who the Savior is, and it points to who the enemy is. The enemy of Christ's people is their sin. And the savior of Christ's people is Christ Jesus.

For the most part the Jews who were looking for Messiah in those days were focused on a political deliverer who would destroy enemy nations. But the angel directed Joseph and directs us to see that the main enemy from which Jesus would be delivering his people is their sin.

Matthew's message to us is this, "The central, the focal, the main, the primary task of this one who has been born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit; this Messiah who is God with us; his reason for coming is to save, rescue, deliver his people from their sins." The Jews thought their great enemies were other nations who threatened their nationality, but no, the greatest enemies are what threatens our souls. Our greatest enemies are our sins. The Messiah came to save from sins, to make them white as snow.

Christ was born for this!

### **III. The Full Disclosure of the Bible**

A. In being conceived and born, Jesus in his deity has taken up residence as a human among humanity. It is amazing and astonishing! Yet as profound as is the incarnation, by itself it does not save. There is no saving power in Jesus' birth. In living, Jesus revealed God. He is the radiance and the express image of God. The life of Jesus showed mercy and genuine care. He displayed zeal for God. He exhibited the power of God. Yet as jaw-dropping as is the beauty of God seen in Jesus, it can only underscore the fact of human sin and its evil. Redemption cannot be brought about through his life by itself.

In addition, Jesus' life is an example of perfection. He shows us what it looks like to love and obey God. We should walk in the way that Jesus walked, but his example cannot rescue us. Neither can our feeble attempts

to follow his example. They merely serve to show how helpless and how lost we are.

In order to do the work of saving, reconciling, and redeeming, Jesus had to die. Hebrews 9:22 says straightforwardly, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin." In order for Jesus to be Jesus, to be the one who saves his people from their sins, he had to die." His work of redemption required living but also dying. Christ was born for this.

B. The death of Jesus was always part of the plan of redemption. There never was a "plan B." And I want you to see how the scriptures make it clear.

1. We look first in Genesis 3. In the aftermath of the sin of Adam and Eve, the Lord God addressed the serpent in the presence of the two humans. He spoke prophetically. This is Genesis 3:15. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." The offspring of the woman would deal the serpent a death blow while the serpent would deliver a painful blow but not one that would bring him down.

Already the Lord God is looking forward to the cross. Jesus is the seed of the woman. He was not born of man but of Mary. The New Testament counterpart is Hebrews 2:14. "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil." The death of Jesus was painful but not ultimately lethal. That death, however, administered a bruise on the head of the devil. He is destroyed.

2. Second, the whole course of the public ministry of Jesus pointed in this direction. When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, John recognized that it should have been the other way around. Jesus insisted because he was fulfilling all righteousness. In being baptized Jesus was identifying with sinners. He was assuming the place of sinners. He never sinned, but he who knew no sin became sin in our behalf. And the wages of sin . . . is . . . death. Listen to these snippets from the gospel of John.

12:23-24 – Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

12:27 – Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? “Father, save me from this hour”? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.

17:1 – on the evening before his crucifixion: “Father, the hour has come.”

Jesus testified that his death was coming in Matthew 16:21. “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he MUST go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed.”

3. Third, Jesus made it clear that his coming death was not out of his control but that he was playing a willing part in it.

John 10:11 – [Jesus said to his disciples] “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

John 10:17-18 – For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord ... this charge I have received from my Father.”

Galatians 2:20 says “he loved me and gave himself for me.”

Isaiah 53:12 attests of Jesus, “he poured out his life unto death.”

The set purpose of God was that Jesus die as a sacrifice. Jesus voluntarily accepted this purpose and obeyed.

4. There is the testimony in Acts.

In Peter’s Pentecost sermon – 2:23 – you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men this Jesus [but he was] “delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.”

In the Apostles’ prayer – 4:27-28 – for truly in this city were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod

and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”

There should be no doubt. Christ was born for this. He was born to die.

C. And Jesus knew it. As surely as his human awareness embraced his divine identity, he was aware that his earthly purpose would culminate in death and subsequent resurrection. He was a sacrifice headed for slaughter. His blood was to be shed to satisfy divine justice, and he knew it.

After God blessed Abraham with his son Isaac, the day of testing came. God said, “Abraham, take your son whom you love and offer him as a burnt sacrifice.” So they arose and made their way to the mountain God would show them. Abraham took the wood of the offering and put it on Isaac’s back. He took in his hand the fire and the knife. And as they were going, Isaac said to his dad, “Father, behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Isaac was not aware that he was to be the sacrifice. “God will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering,” said Abraham. And he did.

Unlike Isaac, Jesus came with full knowledge that he was the lamb God has provided, and there is no substitute for him. Death was inevitable. He was born for this. No one else could be the substitute. In order to save his people from their sins, he had to die. And he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

And because he did, God has highly exalted him and given him the name that is above every name, so that at the name JESUS every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

#### **IV. Reasons for Great Rejoicing**

The birth of Jesus by itself is magnificent, but there is more to the story that gives a songwriter the inspiration to exclaim “Joy to the World, the Lord is come!” His death and resurrection are what make his birth good tidings of

great joy. It is because of the cross that the Bethlehem birth is an occasion for rejoicing.

A. There is a savior for sinners! And Jesus is He! O sinner, look on your sin and be appalled. See your abuse of your creator and let the arrows of conviction sink into your heart. You have broken his law with your heart and with your hands. David says in Psalm 38, "there is no soundness in my flesh because of [God's] indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and fester because of my foolishness, I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all the day I go about mourning . . . I am feeble and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart." This is the heart of the sinner willing to admit his iniquity before God!

But there is joyful news! There are glad tidings of great joy. Unto you is born a Savior who is Christ the Lord! Born to live and born to die in order to be your substitute before God! But you must receive him as such. You must repent of your sin and trust in Him as your Savior in order to receive the salvation he came to obtain. Jesus put it this way: if anyone wishes to come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

If you are not yet following Jesus, I urge you to take up your cross and do so today!

B. There is a second reason for rejoicing in the fact that Christ was born for this. It is because of the cross that I can know what love is. This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. He shows us what it really means to love. It is not how you feel. It is not the emotions you experience. It is how you give. It is how you serve. Rejoice in the love of Jesus, and even so, love one another.

C. I have for you a third reason three for rejoicing that Christ was born for this. Because of the cross, following the example of Jesus takes on a special meaning with reference to suffering. Jesus did not run from suffering. He embraced the suffering. He increased in obedience through

what he suffered. He suffered the horrors of the cross for the ultimate good that would come. For the joy set before him he endured the cross.

Christmas for many is a time of struggling with sorrow. There are pains in your life and sufferings that when everyone is gathered together with friends and family, and everyone is saying, "This is the most wonderful time of the year," you are just not feeling it. I have got two things to say if this is you:

1. Follow the example of Jesus. Embrace whatever you are called to suffer for the good God is producing through it. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. And he uses suffering to bring this about in us.
2. Fix your eyes on the triumph of Jesus. Don't focus on whatever it is that you think is lacking or that is a weight on your emotions. Focus on the gift he was born and died to give. If you are believing in Jesus, you can know Heaven's king descended to earth to be born, to live, to die, and to rise again so that you might have life, eternal life! Rejoice in Jesus!

## **Conclusion**

Christ was born for this. That He was born to die makes all the difference.