

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Christmas Day -- December 25th, 2013

Luke 2:10-14

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

Dear children of God who have come to worship the birth of our Savior.

This past week I received a Christmas card with this written on the front.

“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.”

Isn't this so very true? People want Jesus to be so many things. They want him to fix the economy and all the world's problems. They want Jesus to fix their health and whatever has gone wrong, but we are gathered here today because we know he came for only one reason and that was to save us from our sins.

It got me to thinking about what an unusual plan that God had devised to save the world from sin. It meant that God's one and only Son would take on human flesh born as a baby from a virgin. This is a difficult thing for many people to handle. Many people ask, “How could this baby be the Son of God?” Others ask, “Why would God send his Son to be born and then to die?” There are certainly many questions about this child born 2000+ years ago. It is also a question that will also serve to guide us this Christmas morning as we ask.

Sermon Theme: What Child Is This?

- 1. A Perfect child**
- 2. A Saving child**

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, right? Maybe today, parents think about having someone to love and take care of so that they have someone to love and take care of them when they are old. Or maybe they are looking for someone to be there for their other kids as a playmate and companion. I tell you what - 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 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.

There's something about a birth that is so exciting. It is a completely new start. I think some of the excitement comes from the fact that we see that child so full of potential. This could be the child that will cure cancer, or be a great president or artist. This could be a child that will be great in so many different ways. Do you know what I'm talking about? Those of you that 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 – since our parents can't really take the responsibility for giving us life. That credit ultimately goes to God. So why did God put you here? Go back to the first human life he made. He said why he did it. Remember that? God had that conversation with himself in Genesis 1: **“Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.”** God – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, made us...you were born...to be like God – perfect, to be with God – to 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, right?

Only problem is, that whole “Image of God” thing didn’t last real long. Remember that? God made Adam and Eve, gave them the garden, gave them everything. And he 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 fruit. They doubted God’s love and brought sin and death on themselves and every human since. They ruined their perfection and ability to be with a holy God.

And that’s a problem that we’ve inherited, isn’t it? It’s a problem we’ve perpetuated, haven’t we? God made us to be perfect. You were born to be his companion, and, well, even on such a holy day, even celebrating such a “God-thing” as Christmas – I’d be willing to bet that you wouldn’t pick the word “holy” to describe getting the family ready to come here and making it on time and all the other preparations you’ve made for the day – from the short fuse with the kids to the internal complaining about having to go to church in the middle of the week. I don’t have to do much convincing. We aren’t holy. We aren’t living up to our purpose – the reason for which we were born. And then add to that all the times we go in the absolute opposite direction and do exactly what God tells us not to do.

Now think about what all that means for our relationship with God. More disappointing than the kid that doesn’t win the championship for his father who never grew out of his teenage sporting career, more crushing than the kid who rebels against his 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 – separation from God forever.

And that is why Christmas is such a big deal. It’s a big deal first of all because it is the birth of God’s Son. The holy maker and preserver of the universe sent his own Son. God came to earth. The LORD 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 hold his head up. God became man. That’s mind blowing. But it’s even a bigger deal because of the purpose. This baby was born not to win a state championship or even cure cancer, not to fix hunger or end a war – but to cure sin – the cause of it all.

You see, God’s presence with us would not emphasize the gulf between God and humanity but would span it. God became man - not born in Augustus’ palace 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. He was born in Bethlehem because that is what was promised through the prophets, to a descendant of Adam and Abraham and David, because God had said that’s who 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 put to sleep in a feed trough among the smells of manure and dirt, all because of why he was born. He was born to save us. He was born to take our place and feel the pain our mistakes brought on. 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 God’s Word proclaims that. The God who plays kings and emperors like pawns on a chess board had Caesar move the world’s population with this census so that 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 there.

And 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 Isaiah would be true – “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him.” And look at how simply this birth is described: **“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born and she 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 is 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 the angel’s announcement of it points to the purpose. Skip ahead to that. Verse 11: **“today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ (the 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 is the cloths, the 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 failures – from denying them, to trying to blame someone else for them, making excuses and every rationalization – 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. So 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. He was born to save us from hell.

Now that's a birth worth celebrating, don't you think? So, now, 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 that you will live, so that your rebirth means life forever, so that your guilt is gone, so that you are perfect and perfectly suited to live with your God for all eternity. You were born to live because this child was born to save us. Merry Christmas