

Advent #5: 2019 Christmas Eve Service
The Present

We've seen over the past several weeks that the problem we all have is that we are sinful, in rebellion to our Creator who made us to love & have fellowship with Him. Because He is perfectly righteous, our relationship with Him has been broken due to our sin. Fortunately, because we couldn't do anything to fix this problem ourselves, He promised that He would send Someone who would fix it. He promised that one day He'd send a Redeemer to crush Satan's head & make it possible for us to be restored in our relationship with God. The angels proclaimed that when this promised One came He would bring peace to those God gave His grace to. But this included a death because the wages of sin is death. Therefore, in God's plan this promised Redeemer, who was sinless, would have to die in our place. Tonight we remember the Present God gave in fulfillment of His promise to solve our sin problem. This Baby born in Bethlehem is God incarnate, the 2nd member of the Trinity, who is given to us according to God's plan. But this means He was sent to earth so He might die in our place.

There is no clearer, greater, more pointed demonstration of the love of God than the gift of His Son. Because of the nature of sin, we are unable to help ourselves. God had to move on our behalf. God so loved the world, that He gave! This is, bottom line, a story of magnificent love, love we could never achieve or earn or deserve. It's a present given as a gracious gift by God Himself. God loved us this much, that He would be willing to subject His Son to unthinkable things. Why? Because that one death would give life to many. For Christmas & the birth of this Baby to have its full meaning, in order for us to experience the life that He came to give, we must see Him as our Promised Redeemer who was born to die in our place so that we might have life. God gave us His Son so that He could save us from the penalty & problem of our sins. He took on human flesh, lived a sinless life, & died an atoning death to open a way for us to know & experience God's love, forgiveness, & fellowship. There is no salvation in His birth. His sinless life has no redemptive force of its own. His example, as flawless as it was, couldn't rescue us from

our sins. Even His teaching, the greatest truth ever revealed to man, couldn't save us from our sins. There was a price to be paid for our sins. Someone had to die. Only Jesus could do it.

Think of it this way: Those soft little hands, fashioned by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb, were made so that nails might be driven through them. Those chubby baby feet, pink & unable to walk, would one day walk up a dusty hill to be nailed to a cross. That sweet infant's head with sparkling eyes & eager mouth was formed so that someday men might force a crown of thorns onto it. That tender body, warm & soft, wrapped in swaddling clothes, would one day be ripped open by a spear. Jesus was born to die. That's why He came to this earth. Now, before you think I'm trying to ruin your Christmas spirit, Jesus' death, though devised & carried out by men with evil intentions, was in no way a tragedy. In fact, it represents the greatest victory over evil anyone has ever accomplished. Look beyond the tender manger scene, & see what Jesus Himself knew even before He came, that He was born to die. He died for you. He bore your sin. He purchased your salvation. He guaranteed your sanctification. He destroyed your enemy. & He became a sympathetic high priest. Even now, He's seated next to the Father in heaven, ready to make intercession for you (Heb 7:25). Never forget that the manger & the cross are inseparably linked together in God's plan of our salvation. The goal of Bethlehem was Golgotha.

Why is there a Christmas? In Mt 1:21 we read, **She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.** 1 Jn 3:5 says, **You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.** 1 Jn 4:14, **We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.** & then in 1 Tim 1:15 Paul says, **It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.** The beauty of Christmas is that Christ came into the world to what? Save sinners. Isn't that the beauty of Christmas? It isn't the cards & trees & lights & presents & family gatherings. The beauty of Christmas is that Jesus came to cure the incurable. He came to this earth to save His people from their sins. God determined to send His Son into the world, the brightness of His glory, the express image of His person, partaker of the divine perfection, to die for us. That's the meaning of Christmas. & no matter what you may think & what sentiments you may have & what

warm feelings you might have about Christmas, unless you understand the ugliness of your own sin & embrace Jesus Christ who alone, by His death & resurrection, can save you from that sin, you don't have any connection with Christmas. Sometimes we focus on the giving & on the gifts so much that we miss the fact that what we are celebrating at this time of the year is God's present given to us. Our gift giving is a reflection of the generous gift that God gave to us at the first Christmas, the gift of His Son. It is a gift given out of extreme love; a love so immense, so deep, so wonderful & powerful that we can't fathom what kind of love it is that would cause God to send His Son to this earth to die in our place. The Baby in the manger is our Savior, the only One who rescues us from our sin. The gift that God gave us at Christmas is a Savior. Christmas is a celebration of God becoming human, being born in a manger, for us. As unintelligible, as it is to think of almighty God becoming a weak helpless Baby, that's what happened so that He could be Emmanuel, that is, God with us.

Jesus Himself said, **I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life (Jn 8:12).** & God ... said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. As a symbol of the gift God has given us that we desire to share with those around us, we light our candles.

Revelation 4:11; 5:9, 12-13

11"Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

9"Worthy are You ... for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation."

12"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." 13And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever."

Kent, come & lead us in our closing carols.