

Reclaiming The Wonder Of Christmas

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Preacher: Mike Salvati

[0:00] Let's pray together. Our great triune God, we come to you this morning as your people, and we come to you at this time of the year.

And we would ask this morning that you, God, through your word, as a ministry of your spirit, God, would you do a work of wonder in our hearts?

Would you bring to our minds the wonder of Christmas? God, we pray that you would meet us, continue to meet us, and that we would leave here poised to walk through this season, not just to close out on the 26th, but to be wondrous into the new year.

God, meet us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated. Children, you are excused to your Sunday school classes. And I just want to take a minute here.

This morning is David Ulrich's last time serving us as our worship leader. And he has stepped in about a year and a half ago when we were going through some hard times as a church.

[1:16] And David, Lexi, thank you so much for faithfully serving us as a congregation. We are so grateful for you. Thank you. And just personally, I'm extremely grateful for you, David.

Thank you so much. Well, it is upon us. Christmas time has come. I'm not sure if you noticed this, but the 24-hour Christmas music cycle began a little early this year.

In fact, my wife, in principle, said, I will not listen to the Christmas music until Thanksgiving is done. I, on the other hand, started sneakily listening to the Christmas music.

It was not a point of divisiveness between us. But it started early. So Christmas music, 24 hours. Christmas catalogs coming in.

Christmas decorations being hung, lit up. Christmas food being prepared and thought of. Christmas TV, Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer.

[2:27] Elf, Miracle on 34th Street. It's a Wonderful Life. It's all lining up. Our culture, the culture that we're living in, is creating an atmosphere of wonder around this season.

Here's the deal. It doesn't revive your soul. At best, all these things, and they're good.

They're temporary. And as a pastor, you know what I want to help you get ready for? I want you to get ready for December 25th. And so on the Christmas Eve, during that service, we're singing our souls out to our wonderful God.

But when December 26th rolls around, you guys don't drop off in a depression. You know, who is the owner, as of yet, of a real Christmas tree?

We are. We went and got our Christmas tree this past Monday and set it up. And what will inevitably happen is, no matter how much we water it, this tree, which is so fragrant right now with pine in our house, its little needles are soft, the bows are tender.

[3:48] You know, you reach in to fill water, you don't have needles drop all around you. It's still kind of living. But what inevitably happens is, it slowly dries out. The needles start dropping, the bows get brittle.

It's a little metaphor of what many of us experience. By the time December 26th around, we don't want any of us to be like a discarded Christmas tree that's dry and brittle and gets to start it in the city pickups.

Here's what we're looking to do this Christmas time. We believe God's word revives us. And we want this season for us all to be a time of reviving.

A time not of needles dropping, but of bearing fruit. A time of not growing brittle, but of growing tender to the Lord.

Not of hardening, but of softening. And so this month, starting today, we're doing a little series called Reclaiming Christmas. And so this morning, we're going to reclaim the wonder of Christmas the true wonder.

[4:59] Next Sunday, we're going to reclaim the joy of Christmas, the true joy of Christmas. Then we're going to reclaim the glory of Christmas. On Christmas Eve, we're going to reclaim the worship, the praise of Christmas.

And then Christmas isn't done. We're going all the way through to New Year's Eve. And on that Sunday, we're going to reclaim the mission, the purpose of Christmas.

And this morning, we're talking about wonder. And wonder is simply that experience of awe and amazement every one of us in this room have experienced in some measure.

Who hasn't walked out of their homes on a crisp January Wisconsin morning to a fresh fall of four inches of snow?

And you walk out, and instantly your lungs are filled with that cold, chilly air. And it is something good about it. You hear your boots crunching on that four inches of virgin snow.

[6:02] Your eyes alight on all the winter wonderland of white spread apart. It's a blanket. It's bright. It's sparkling in the sunlight.

And as you tune your ears to it, there is a muffled silence. It's wonderful. You've experienced wonder too when you've held a little infant in your hands.

Newly born. And you're thinking, wow, this child, fully human. It's got his life in front of him.

And if you're a parent of this child, you have this sense of wonder. It's like, this baby is dependent on me. We've all experienced wonder to some degree.

This culture that we live in tends to try to fabricate a wonder around this time. It doesn't last. You know what happens on December 26th with your 24-hour Christmas music station?

[7:10] They go back to what they were playing before. By December 26th, you're thinking about, how do I work off all this weight I gain with all this Christmas food?

December 26th rolls around, and you're thinking, how long do we have the lights up? December 26th rolls around, and you're thinking, when do we take the tree down, and when do we bring it to the dump? December 26th will come, and the wonder of this world will suddenly stop.

But the wonder of God's word never stops. And so this morning, this Christmas, I want to help you get your wonder on.

To wonder at God's word and what God has to say about Christmas. And so this morning, I'm going to try to fill your heart with wonder from God's word.

So we're going to look at three wonders this morning. The wonder of the plan, the wonder of the person, and the wonder of the purpose. And typically, I just preach through a section of the Bible.

[8:23] This morning's a little different. I'm going to be kind of preaching kind of more of a theological meditation, reflections on the wonder of the plan, the wonder of the person, and the wonder of the purpose.

So you guys ready to get your wonder on? Let's talk about the wonder of his plan. Have you ever been leaving on a road trip from your home and you're out the door, you're in the car, who knows who's in the car with you, but you're going down, you're a minute in, and then all of a sudden someone says, I forgot, I forgot to go to the bathroom, I forgot to turn off the stove, I forgot to close the garage door, I forgot to lock the door, I forgot to pack, I forgot, and so what do you have to do? You got to go back. You got to go back, you get it all done, and then you leave again. As followers of Jesus living in this culture and living in this time, do you know what can happen?

The culture Christmas bus can leave and can start heading down that road of Christmas 2017 and we find ourselves on it and then we have to ask, did I forget something?

And many of us forget the wonder of Christmas. So, let me help you get your wonder on.

[9:55] One of the things that can happen to us as we celebrate Christmas is that we can just kind of focus us on the here and now of a particular Christmas. Christmas, December 2017 and it occupies our thinking and it occupies our planning.

But just like leaving down a road and realizing you've forgotten something, I want to bring you back this Christmas time. I want to bring you back so you don't forget what is central to Christmas, the wonder.

And so, let's go back first by going back to the first century in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. And I'm just going to kind of move quickly through this.

I just want to start getting some things in your mind. That there is a plan in place and it's a wonderful plan. In Matthew 118, 118 through 23, an angel appears to Joseph and he tells him that his fiancée who's pregnant, he shouldn't divorce her, he shouldn't put her away because she's been conceived by the Holy Spirit with a child from God.

And so, of all the little baby boys born 2,000 years ago, there was one of them who an angel is saying, this one is unique. In Matthew 2, verses 1 through 6, Herod is approached by some wise men who have seen this child's star in the sky and they ask Herod where the king of the Jews is. [11:33] The king of the Jews appears at the beginning of Matthew and at the end of the Matthew. At the end of Matthew, it's on the plaque above Jesus' head on the cross.

But they ask Herod, where is the king of the Jews? Herod says, let me talk to my guys. His guys tell him that the Messiah, the Christ, is going to be born in Bethlehem of Judea. So what we learn from that first century is that this child is going to be born.

It's announced by an angel. He's going to be born to Joseph's fiancée who has miraculously gotten pregnant and he's going to be born in Bethlehem. And in Luke chapter 1, verses 26 through 33, Gabriel the angel goes to Mary and tells Mary that she's going to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. And what's most interesting there is that this child to be born to her, he's going to reign on David's throne forever. And so not only is this child, from going back to just the first century, we learn this is a unique child born of a virgin, born in Bethlehem, born to reign forever on David's throne.

We've got to be like, well, this is a unique baby. But you know what? To really understand how unique this child is, we've got to go back beyond 2,000 years. We've got to go another 800 years beyond that.

[13:02] We've got to go to the prophet Isaiah and the prophet Micah. Micah. In Matthew 1, 18-23, when Matthew is sharing with us the story of this angel coming to Joseph and talking about the conception that takes place in Mary, if you would turn to Matthew 1, 23, there's a really interesting point that's made.

All this took place in 22 to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

So here's what's going on. 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem, there's this little baby boy that's born and he's born miraculously. And Matthew says, oh, by the way, that's the fulfillment of a prophecy from Isaiah 7:14, 800 years beforehand that this child would be born of a virgin and his name would be Emmanuel, God with us.

Do you know what prophecy implies in the fulfillment of prophecy? There's a plan. In Matthew 2, the fulfillment of prophecy.

2, 5, they told him in Bethlehem of Judea for it is written by the prophet and you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judea are by no means least among the rulers of Judah for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

[14:44] Not only will this child be born in Bethlehem but he will be a shepherd of God's people, a king. So, what Matthew is saying in Matthew 2 is that what takes place in the birth of this baby in Bethlehem at that time is a fulfillment of what Micah is talking about in Micah 5, 2.

And when prophecy is fulfilled it reveals a plan. In Luke 1, 26-33 we have the echoes of another passage. If you want to look there with me, Luke chapter 1 verses 32 we read this, he will be great and this is Gabriel speaking to Mary, he will be great and will be called the son of the most high and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end.

There will be no end. There will be no end. There will be no end. Listen to Isaiah 9, 6 and 7.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government shall be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government of peace there will be no end. There will be no end. There will be no end. On the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from time forth, this time forth and forevermore the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

[16:23] When we go back to 2,800 years from now and we see these prophecies of Isaiah and Micah and we see these prophecies being fulfilled in the birth of this little boy, it speaks of a plan.

And so when we think about December 2017, we need to keep in mind that this Christmas is way bigger than this year. There is a great plan in place.

And it goes back further. It goes back to Genesis chapter 3. In the midst of all these curses, God speaks a promise when he's cursing the serpent. In Genesis chapter 3, he speaks a promise of an offspring of Eve who will come and he's a male offspring and he will crush the head of the serpent. There's a plan. And it goes even back further. It goes beyond Genesis chapter 3. It goes beyond Genesis chapter 1 and the creation of all things.

Ephesians chapter 1 speaks of a plan for the fullness of time. Ephesians 1, 3 through 14 is this wonderful, wonderful passage about the triune God enacting a saving plan for the fullness of time that finds its unity in Jesus.

[17:53] God the Father God the Son accomplished the plan and God the Spirit applies the plan.

What I want to do is help you to understand the context historically of Christmas. this Christmas, December 2017, we are observing something that took place 2,000 years ago and it was the fulfillment of a plan that God enacted from before the foundation of the world.

I want to help you get your wonder on a little bit. It's not just this Christmas. Christmas is about a plan for the fullness of time.

and it centers on a person. The plan is big from everlasting to everlasting and the person who's central to this plan is amazing.

We've looked at the plan now let's look at the person. I want to help you wonder at the person central to Christmas. It's the same person who's central to God's plan for the fullness of time.

[19:21] God's plan of salvation. In Ephesians chapter 1 we read that there's a plan in place for the fullness of time for God to unite all things in Christ.

Jesus' birth is the incarnate turning point to God's plan of salvation. You know before becoming a pastor here I served as a youth pastor for 10 years at a church about 8 miles west of here.

And I regularly experience a really interesting phenomenon. Here's what happens. In those years I was at Crossway I got to rub shoulders with a lot of young people.

And so what happens now is this. 5, 10, 15 years later I will bump into some of these young people and I will not recognize them at first. I'd be kind of like whoa you look familiar.

And what I realize is that this person that I'm encountering is the same person I knew 5, 10 years ago. I just have this little snapshot of this person in my mind as a perpetual 7th grade prepubescent boy.

[20:33] And so I bump into it and I'm like whoa what happened to you? You're like 6 inches taller you've got a beard you've got a deep voice you're going to college I have this tendency of kind of locking people into a certain time.

Limited picture of a person. We can make the same mistake with Jesus at Christmas time. We can keep Jesus as a perpetual infant lying in a manger.

That's our snapshot of the Christmas Jesus. And it's only complicated by all the plastic baby Jesus out there. Sentimentality over these things can actually work against the wonder do his name.

Can I help you wonder at this baby? Let's get our wonder on regarding this baby. Here's something I want to remind you of this person.

This person born a baby lying in a manger he existed before he was born.

[21:57] The baby is the second person of the Trinity born of a woman. Jesus the man had eternally existed as the second person of the Trinity prior to his conception and birth.

I know we're in deep waters right now. Dave referenced John chapter 1. If you would flip to John chapter 1 we read this.

In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. The word of course is the second person of the Trinity and he existed before he took on flesh.

John 1 14. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us. Here's what you need to understand. The second person of the Trinity didn't come into existence at the birth of Jesus.

The second person of the Trinity existed eternally before he was conceived as the baby Jesus. Get your wonder on. And more so this birth of this baby the second person of the Trinity who took on flesh flesh.

[23:16] This isn't the first appearance that he makes in the Bible. There are pre-incarnate appearances of the second person of the Trinity throughout the Old Testament.

Now in the Old Testament the doctrine of the Trinity is not well developed and it gets more developed in the New Testament but we do see the members of the Trinity in the Old Testament. They're called Christophanies. We could point to a couple places. One theologian talks about the angel of the Lord as the appearing of the pre-incarnate Christ and he makes a pretty interesting case for that.

And then there's the whole episode in Daniel chapter 3 where Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will not worship at Nebuchadnezzar's image and he gets really angry and he throws him in the fiery furnace and after he throws him in the fiery furnace he turns to his guys and he says guys didn't we throw three guys in because I see a fourth and the fourth is shining like a son of God.

Who is that fourth guy? There's going to come a day when you are standing Lord willing in the New Jerusalem and you might be standing next to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and you say Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who is that fourth guy?

[24:34] You know what they're going to do? He's the one at the center of all things right now. He's the one that's lighting up the New Jerusalem right now. That's the one that was with us.

My favorite Christophany is in Joshua chapter 5. Joshua is going out to battle. He bumps into this guy called the commander of the Lord's army.

Joshua falls at this commander's feet and worships him. Do you know what the commander of the Lord's army does? Nothing. He lets them worship him.

And then he says take off your feet for you're standing on holy ground. Only God says that. So here we have this man who is visible, audible, physically present, God in the flesh in Joshua chapter 5. life. You see, this is the birth of Jesus. It's not the first time the second person of the Trinity has shown up. Get your wonder wrong.

[25:47] The second person of the Trinity, this baby is God in the flesh. I mean, his conception in Mary's womb in Luke chapter 1 verses 34 through 37, it is a triune event.

If you read it carefully, you see that God most high overshadows Mary, that's the God the Father, the God the Spirit is the actual one, the agent of conception. In a miracle, we just don't get.

The Spirit of God causes the second person of the Trinity to be incarnated into Mary as a zygote. It's phenomenal.

And the result is not a plastic baby Jesus. The result is the second person of the Trinity made incarnate, fully God, fully man, in one person, and Luke 1.35 calls him holy, without sin.

And I hope you know he didn't stay a baby. He lived a perfect life, a life that none of us could live. And then he was crucified on a cross.

[27:05] The Holy One was crucified as a criminal with king of the Jews over his head. He was buried, he was raised again on the third day, just like he said he would, and proved his victory over sin, death, and the devil.

And then he ascended on high to now where he's at right now, at the right hand of God. He's interceding for his church. He is building his church in whom the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

And he's sitting on G, waiting for O from the Father to come back. And when he comes back, he's going to make all things right. He's going to judge the world with equity.

And then he's going to recreate the heavens and the earth. And then we who bow our knee to him now, we, when he comes back, we will be with our Savior King in his presence, in his place, in, with his people forever.

He's not a plastic Jesus. Don't limit him to this snapshot of him being a little baby. He's not a baby right now.

[28:19] He became a baby. And when you get this full sense of who the second person of the Trinity is and what he's done, we didn't even talk about him being the creator of all things.

When you realize that he took on human flesh, Philippians 2, taking the form of a servant, he would do that. It's amazing.

It's wonderful. It should awe you. We've looked at the plan.

It's a plan for the fullness of time. We've looked at this person, Jesus, who is born of this virgin, fulfilling prophecy, and he is God in the flesh.

But I want to ask a question now of why? What's the purpose of this plan that focuses on this person? Well, let's get your wonder on a little bit more.

[29:32] The reason why Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, took on human flesh was not just to show us that he could do it. So I told you, it's not for that reason.

The second person of the Trinity became human, took on human flesh, was incarnated for a purpose.

And that purpose is the purpose for God's plan for the fullness of time. The birth of Jesus is the pivot point in God's saving plan.

Galatians 4.4 says, at just the right time, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law so that we could experience the adoption of sons and daughters.

The purpose for why Jesus took on flesh, well, it was not to give us 24-hour Christmas music.

[30:42] It was not so that we could have all sorts of catalogs. It was not so that the U.S. economy can get a shot in the arm every so often during the year. Jesus took on flesh not so that we could enjoy vacations.

The reason why the second person of the Trinity took on flesh was to save, to rescue, to redeem sinners in their sin.

Back in Genesis chapter 3, everything went sideways for humankind. We were separated from God. We were divided internally.

We were separated and hostile to other human beings. We were even separated from creation. It was a comprehensive mess made by sin.

And so that puts us in the very unique position of needing a Savior. A Savior who will reconcile sinners to a holy God, who will reunify a sinner's divided self, who would restore sinners who are hostile with other sinners, and a Savior who will recreate creation, wiping it off of its bondage to decay, and recreating it in its full glory.

[32:08] The only Savior that can do that is God Himself. Jesus is the perfect mediator between God and man, because Jesus is fully God and fully man.

He is Emmanuel. And the reason why He took on flesh was to save you from your sin. Christmas time is salvation time.

Merry Christmas is merry salvation. I mean, it's in the name. The name Jesus, Matthew 1, 21, literally means the Lord saves.

The second person of the Trinity took on human flesh, and He's named by God the Father as the Lord saves. The Lord saves incarnate.

Furthermore, if you look back to Isaiah, Isaiah has some two very interesting prophecies. In Isaiah 7, 14, which has been read already, you have the prophecy of a virgin conceiving a child, and His name being Emmanuel.

[33:29] A miraculous conception. And if you flip to the right in Isaiah, to Isaiah 53, you have a prophecy of the same one.

But it's not His miraculous birth, it's His substitutionary death. Same two prophecies speaking of the same Emmanuel.

So let me just read two verses from Isaiah 53. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

But He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

And with His wounds, we are healed. Jesus came, took on flesh, ultimately to rescue sinners from their sins.

[34:34] That's God's plan for the fullness of time. This Christmas time, December 2017, let's reclaim the wonder of Christmas.

Let's wonder at the plan. Let's wonder at this unique person, Jesus. And let's wonder at the purpose. The purpose of Christmas is part of God's saving plan to rescue sinners from their sin.

So, when December 26 rolls around, you don't have to be like that dried out Christmas tree sitting in the city pickup thing.

No, you can be wondering. You can be in awe. It doesn't have to get stale. No, get your wonder on.

Remember who this is. Remember what it's all about. Remember the scale of His plan. And when you remember that, come December 26, you'll be looking to the new year knowing who this baby is.

[36:00] Let's pray. God in heaven, we thank you so much for your word. We thank you for what your word has to say about Jesus.

And we thank you for what your word has to say about this plan for the fullness of time. and we're thankful for making known to us that this plan for the fullness of time focused on the person of Jesus is a plan of salvation.

God, would you help us to live in that? To wonder. To be amazed. And to rejoice. God, may our singing reflect the wonder of who you are and what you've done.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.