

Christmas Eve 2018

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Date: 24 December 2018

Preacher: Fr. Caleb Evans

[0:00] Amen. And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Well, everyone, Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas. Feels good to finally say that, does it not? Yes. After all the excitement and the expectation, we are finally here. Isn't that fantastic?

So I have to say it again. Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas. Speaking of excitement, as I was preparing for this sermon, I was reminded of a time I was talking with a colleague a few years ago about how excited our children get at Christmas time.

He mentioned to me at the time that he didn't think he would ever again in his life be as excited about anything as children are on Christmas morning. And I have to say, I already know what's going to happen at my house tomorrow morning.

[1:19] I'm going to be blissfully snoozing. And way too early, a little girl is going to rouse me from my slumber. Thrilled that it's Christmas morning and there are presents to be opened.

And honestly, in those first few moments, I am probably going to feel pretty Grinch-like. But it won't last. Because everybody loves Christmas, even tired and grumpy dads.

I was talking just yesterday to a friend who has spent some time teaching in China. And he tells me that one hears Christmas carols in stores there this time of year.

Across cultures, people of every age love Christmas. Why is that? On one level, I think we could say, well, everyone likes a good party.

That probably accounts for some of it. I think we could say that everyone likes to give and to receive gifts. But I don't think that really explains all of it. Now, what I would say is this.

[2:23] I think that Christmas touches something deep in the human heart. And tonight, I want us to think about why that is. The English writer G.K. Chesterton once talked about how even atheists can find themselves impacted by Christmas.

Chesterton put it this way. Any agnostic or atheist whose childhood has known a real Christmas has ever afterwards, whether he likes it or not, an association in his mind between two ideas that most of mankind must regard as remote from each other.

The idea of a baby and the idea of the unknown strength that sustains the stars. His instincts and imagination can still connect them when his reason can no longer see the need of the connection. For him, there will always be some savor of religion about the mere picture of a mother and a baby. Some hint of mercy and softening about the mere mention of the dreadful name of God.

So, my friends, in other words, I would put it this way. If Christmas touches your heart in some way that you can't quite explain, the reason is actually a very simple one.

[3:39] Your heart was created by God to find your delight in knowing God and loving God. You were created to be in a relationship with Jesus Christ, this one whose birth we celebrate tonight, this God who became man.

And at Christmas, whether you realize it or not, you are faced with a reminder of the person your heart was created to love and enjoy forever.

And you were faced with a reminder of what he did, becoming a baby who would grow up to die on a cross because he loved you and desired to bring you home.

At Christmas, you and I are confronted with the love and the tenderness and the kindness of a God who would take on human flesh, becoming a hopeless baby so that you could be with him and enjoy him forever.

Christmas touches something deep inside of us because every human heart has a hole that only Jesus Christ can fill.

[4:54] The reminder that we're experiencing tonight of who Jesus is and why he came is a reminder that our hearts have a desire that nothing in this world can ever satisfy, that only Jesus Christ can satisfy.

And the birth of Jesus, which we're celebrating tonight, is such a powerful demonstration of how much God loves us.

Especially when we think about what the birth of Jesus really means. Let's think again for a second about what the angel said to the shepherds.

We think of our nativity sets. We think of the cute baby, the animals.

We think of the beautiful depictions of the baby Jesus on Christmas cards. And we see certainly something important about God. We see God's tenderness. But if we only think about that side of what happened in Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago, we miss a big part of the picture.

[6:08] Because what we are witnessing when we look at the birth of Jesus is actually the beginning of a rescue mission. We're seeing God step foot into a world that is in bondage in order to defeat the captor and set the captives free.

Amen. Christmas reminds us of two things. First, that this world is in need of salvation. That it's not the way that it's supposed to be.

And that we're not the way we are supposed to be either. Second, it reminds us that God has done and is doing something about it. And what He is doing about it will be successful.

The message of Christmas is that God stepped foot into a broken world and came to broken people to save, to heal, to rescue, and to redeem.

What do we mean by that? Well, do any of us have any doubt that the world we're living in isn't the way that it's supposed to be? We don't have to think very hard to come to the realization that in this world we're living in, evil is commonplace, suffering is commonplace, death is commonplace.

[7:27] And I promise you that I'm not pointing all of this out to ruin your Yuletide cheer. Quite the opposite, so stay with me. Then we look at ourselves. We look at people.

We realize that we're not the way we're supposed to be either. Recently, I heard someone ask that timeless question. Why can't we all just get along? And why is it that the world isn't the way it's supposed to be?

Why is it that we aren't the way we're supposed to be? Why do we die? And the answer comes down to one little word. Sin. Sin breaks our fellowship with God.

Sin causes us to hurt each other. And sin leads to death. That is our biggest problem. And again, I'm not pointing that out to ruin your Christmas cheer or your enjoyment of your figgy pudding or anything of the sort.

I'm pointing that out because we can't understand the message of Christmas and why it is truly good news unless we understand our dilemma. And the basic message is this.

[8:39] Jesus came to rescue us from our biggest problem and that is sin. This little baby was born to save his people from their sins, as the scriptures say.

Because we have gone astray, we have fallen into sin and our fellowship with God, which is what we were created for, was broken because God is holy and just and cannot be in the presence of sin.

And so Jesus came, lived a perfect life, and died the death that we deserve for our sins so that we can find forgiveness and be made right with God. Jesus then rose from the dead, defeating death for us, guaranteeing that everyone who puts their trust in him will share in his victory and have eternal life.

We don't understand the significance of the birth of Jesus unless we understand the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection as well. We don't understand the beginning of God's rescue plan and sending his son unless we understand the whole plan.

And when we understand all of that, we realize something. This baby that we celebrate, born more than 2,000 years ago, who is now reigning on his throne, this Jesus is our salvation.

[10:04] His perfect life, his death for us, his resurrection, it is our only hope of rescue from sin and death. Unto us is born a Savior.

Tonight we are celebrating the fact that the Rescuer has arrived in this broken world and that all who believe in his name, the precious name of Jesus, will be rescued.

Tonight, we celebrate. Don't we? Because even though death is real, even though suffering is real, even though sin is real, the truth is this.

The rescue mission has begun and we can be certain that it will be successful. Christmas means that sin, that suffering, that death are not going to win.

And here is the truly amazing thing. This epic rescue story that we are talking about tonight can be our story.

[11:26] And if it's not our story, then we're still in bondage and captivity to sin and death. But I want everyone to hear me plainly tonight. No matter where you are, no matter what you have done, no matter how hopeless your situation might seem, this Jesus, this Rescuer, whose birth we celebrate tonight, can save you.

In John chapter 1, we read of Jesus. He came to His own and His own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.

So, here are the questions that all of us are confronted with tonight. Here are the questions raised by our celebration of Christmas.

Have I received Jesus? Have I believed in His name? In our hymn from just a few minutes ago, we sang these words. How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given, so God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven.

No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in. O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray, cast out our sin, and enter in.

[13:04] Be born in us today. May. The gift of Jesus is incredible.

It's Him that we just sang reminds us that if we ask Jesus to save us from our sins, if we ask Him to enter in, if we ask Him to live in us, He will do it.

And we will have peace and joy, forgiveness and transformation. We will have a loving relationship with the living God.

In closing, I want us to think again, to ask ourselves again, why does Christmas seem to touch some deep place in the human heart?

I would say that it's because Christmas is about Jesus. And we all have a hole in our heart that only He can fill.

[14:12] That peace, that joy, that contentment, that all of us have been searching for for our entire lives, and have failed to find, I'm here to tell you tonight that it can be found.

It can be found in Jesus Christ and in Him alone. We all have a deep desire in our hearts that no earthly thing can satisfy.

But you know what? Jesus can satisfy it. If we haven't asked Jesus to cast out our sin and enter in, as the words of that hymn tell us, now is the time to do it.

And tonight, we celebrate because the rescue mission has begun and because this epic story of rescue is our story.

Christ is born and that changes everything. It can change your life and it can change my life. Praise the Lord.

[15:17] Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.