

Fourth Sunday of Advent

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Date: 20 December 2020

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 0 0] In Matthew, if you'd like to turn to Matthew, this is the end of chapter 1 that precedes the readings that the children read out for us this morning. We'll pick it up at verse 18 and go through to the end of chapter 1.

So chapter 1, verse 18 through to the end. Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.

When his mother Mary had betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, and in a dream sang, Joseph, son of David, do not fear. Take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place 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. When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took his wife, but he knew her not until she had given birth to a son, and he called his name Jesus. Well, rightly so, we come back to the nativity account every year, and we do so at the same time each year. We locate this time as the time of year that Jesus was brought into the world, and we all have dates and days like that. If I go back 10 years, if I go back 10 years to this day, two o'clock in the morning, not this morning, but Monday morning, 10 years ago, I was digging snow off the drive.

And why two o'clock in the morning? Well, I wasn't the only one doing it. Stuart McKenzie came down, and at two o'clock in the morning, there were two of us outside digging the snow because my wife was going into labor with Bethany. So we were trying to get her to the hospital, and of course, she was her birthday today. And it's amazing how certain days flood you back a certain amount of memories. My son reminded me when he asked me the question, do you know what Adam said to his wife the day before Christmas? It's Christmas Eve? I'll pray that you receive a sense of humor at Christmas.

[3 : 3 8] There are certain things that invoke our memory, and there's probably nothing more than Christmas and Easter to do the very same thing with Christ. Christmas reminds us who it has been born, and most importantly, why it is he who had to have been born to do what only he could do. And of course, Advent leads us to the cross. The cross leads us to the resurrection. The resurrection leads us to the ascension. The ascension leads us to the reminder that Christ will return. Every date in action on those dates leads us to think of something else, especially when we consider it in Scripture.

Well, as we come to this time of year, and as we consider who it is being born, we must consider it in light of what corresponds. And by that, I'm going to take you through a few familiar things just to show you why it was that God sent his Son into the world in order to become man. Now, we in the Bible study and over a couple of Sundays have looked at the importance of the incarnation of Christ, why it is so important to understand that Christ is fully God and fully man. I'm going to try and illustrate this.

I'm going to do so by using an illustration from Abraham Kuyper. Abraham Kuyper understood and therefore taught that Christians must understand those things which correspond to their nature and those things which conflict with their nature. In other words, there are some things that we can use for some things and some things that we can only use for other things. And to put it this way, he says that nails cannot be used for mending glass.

Nails can be used for mending wood because there's a relationship between the two, whereas if something comes apart and you put a nail in it, it's possible for those two things to be held together again. But you cannot use a nail to mend glass. In fact, if you were to put a nail into a piece of glass, it would break the glass further. There are some things which relate, and there are some things which do not relate. And therefore, if you're going to fix something, if you have a problem that you have to fix, then the right solution must be found. In the same way, you cannot fix glass with nails. You need something else to mend it. You need something else to bring it back together to restore it. Something else must be found. And Abraham Kuyper said that this is the very foundation of good Christian thinking when thinking about God's common grace, and most importantly, when you get to Christ. Another example of this would be when we think about Jesus Christ and his temptation. That after a period of time where he has not eaten and then is tempted by Satan, one of the temptations is that Jesus could turn these stones into bread. Now, we ought to pause and stop. Well, why not just eat stones? And it comes immediately to us that you cannot eat stones.

You can build houses with stones. You can lay stones as a foundation for a house, but you cannot eat stones. Satan understood this. Satan understood that if Christ is going to deal with his hunger, then command these stones to become bread. Because bread will feed you. Bread is what you need. It corresponds to your nature. In other words, the stones won't do anything good for me. I need bread. And of course, Jesus rightly said to him, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. So Jesus is taking it now one step further, where he says, yes, bread is a temporary fix for a temporary body. But what man really needs is something even greater than bread. So stones cannot feed a person. Bread can. But Jesus is saying, no, I need something even greater than that to live by.

[8 : 07] And what he needs is the word of God, that every man shall live by the word of God. The word of God is that which gives life. Therefore, when we think about the coming of Christ, and when we think about the problem, we truly appreciate Christ, when we truly appreciate the problem, we truly appreciate what God is given, when we truly understand what it is that has to be mended, what it is that has to be fixed, then we can actually come to understand why God couldn't do it in any other way. There is a particular way that men and women, boys and girls must be saved. And it's a way that must correspond to their nature. And it's not just a matter of physical being, it's not just a matter of material, though that is important, hence why God became man.

A man had to take the place of men. The human had to take the place of humans. There had to be that corresponding in order for the salvation to be possible. But of course, there's more happening than that. Before God, we are sinners. And that sin, often, though permeates through the material, can often happen in thought alone. And doesn't make its way out into the material world, but it's in our imaginations. It's in our thoughts, it's in desires, it may not even get into a physical form, but it's there. And so there are other aspects that need to be fixed. Well, when you look at Christ, and you see what they say about this child Christ, and who it is that has been given, that what you're beginning to appreciate here is what God is showing you. That God is not just showing you what a wonderful Savior you have, but by giving you Christ, and by you fully understanding what it is that you are receiving, you're also getting to see your complete inability to do anything to change your circumstance yourself.

that our condition is beyond any human improvement. And so when we hear these words, that you shall call his name Jesus, the next thing that is said is this, for he will save his people from their sins. In other words, this person will do this thing.

There's nothing else in history that can do that, in the history past or in the history to come. God has decided that this one person, Christ Jesus himself, would be the one who would forgive sin. Not only forgive sin, but remove sin. And there's two very beautiful words that are used to describe this, that most people talk about what's called the propitiation of sin. But even before you get to that, there's a wonderful word called the expiation. And what that means is, is that God doesn't just give us Christ to protect us from his judgment on sin, propitiation. But he gives us Christ in order to remove that sin from us in the first place, expiation. And what we see in the person of Christ, how is it that this Jesus will forgive? He takes all of that sin off of us, expiates, onto himself.

And then in propitiation, God judges him instead of us. So when Joseph hears these words, you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from his sins, it's going to take, as you can see, an entire gospel for us to truly appreciate how it is that God is going to do that. And if you ever want to question why was that so necessary, then go back to the simple illustration of the problem and fixes.

[12 : 30] That we recognize that there are some tools you cannot use for some jobs. We recognize that when Satan tempted Jesus to turn these stones into bread, it is because you cannot eat stones, but you can eat bread. The fix is that which corresponds to our nature. And our nature is sinful. And our nature, as God properly ordained it to be in creation, is that we would be without sin. To be truly human is to be without sin, just as God created the first man and woman. That's true humanity. True humanity is humanity without the presence of sin. And so what we have in the person of Christ is what a truly human person looks like. Yes, he's God. But he is also the only truest human that the world has got to see.

And so what God has given us in the person of Christ is what we will become. As we look at Christ, what you're looking at is you. When you look at Christ and all of his glory and all of his humanity as it is, you will see what you will become and have become in him already. It's only a matter of time before we are glorified. But until that time, remember what the problem is and remember that only Christ can fix it. So this Christmas, it may be tempting to think about the lovely decorations. And thank you very much for the tree. I forgot to mention it last week, I think with the passing of Carrie. But thank you very much for these. These things are beautiful.

And they do lighten spirits. These candles also, they bring a sense of timing to the year. But they're all indicators. They're all signs, hopefully, that lead us to the very central point of Christmas. That God sent his son to fix something. That God sent his son to mend a problem.

That God sent his son to solve a big, big corruption. And all of that is found in us. And so the only way this can be redeemed, the only way we can be redeemed, the only way anything can be redeemed and restored is in this person, Jesus Christ. You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. Amen.

Well, let's close with our final carol. We've heard it played on the violin. Now we'll hear it.

[15 : 24] It's the full carol. Thank you, Phil. Joy to the world. The Lord is come. Let earth receive her King. Let every heart prepare him.

And heaven and heaven and nature. And heaven and nature sing. And heaven and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the world. The Savior brings. Let all their songs employ.

Joy to the world. While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains. Repeat the sounding joy. Repeat the sounding joy. Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

Okay. He rules the world. Heat the bonds? Vogels and heap Joel.

[16 : 50] Use His new magic Ask. Joy to the toxic Éical. His righteousness and wonders of his love And wonders of his love And wonders and wonders of his love Well may the Lord bless you And may the Lord keep you And as you go from here and as over the Christmas period May you know his blessing in many forms And may that blessing come to you both now And over these coming months Father God I ask on behalf of these people here this morning That you would bless and keep them In Jesus name, Amen Amen Well I hope you have a Merry Christmas