

EPIPHANY 3, JANUARY 26, 2020 (SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE SUNDAY) Rev. Roger A. Erdman

Lectionary Readings: Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42a

Sermon Title: *Why a Womb?*

Prayer: *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of [our] heart[s] be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, [our] Rock and [our] Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)*

Salutation: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:2)

Text: The Word from God through which the Holy Spirit comes to stir our hearts for the Third Sunday after the Epiphany of Our Lord (Sanctity of Human Life Sunday) is from our Old Testament Reading: Isaiah, chapter 49.

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ, “*The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of My mother He named My name*” (v 1). As we hear the pre-incarnate Christ speak in our Old Testament Reading, why through a womb that our Lord Jesus Christ was called forth to be our Savior? The Word of God before us today provides answers to this question. God will teach us that: THE MESSIAH HAD TO BE CALLED FROM THE WOMB TO IDENTIFY WITH AND BRING SALVATION FOR ALL HUMANITY.

I. Why a womb? First, it took a womb to equip the Messiah properly for the task of bringing salvation to the end of the earth. Here in Isaiah’s second “*Suffering Servant*” prophecy, Jesus Himself speaks to us. He tells us that:

- God the Father “*formed Me from the womb to be His servant*” (v 5).
- God formed His mouth “*like a sharp sword*” and made Him like “*a polished arrow*” (v 2).

From these words of Jesus, as the Suffering Servant, we see that His task would require a human body. Therefore, after His miraculous conception by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus grew and developed in Mary’s womb just like every human being:

- His heart began beating at around twenty-four days.
- Blood flowed in His veins at thirty days.
- He produced brain waves at forty-three days.
- By seven weeks He had little feet and little hands complete with fingerprints.
- By eight weeks He, like all of us, was a minuscule baby one and an eighth inches long and weighing one-thirtieth of an ounce. (Information taken from the pamphlet *Life before Birth* [Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 1995].)

II. Why a womb? The womb was an absolutely necessary place to begin the task of bringing salvation to a fallen world. And, here's why:

"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me"
(Psalm 51:5 NIV).

Since our humanity begins at the moment of conception, our sinfulness begins at the moment of conception. Therefore, it was necessary for our salvation that the servant Jesus be called "*from the womb*" to be our Savior from sin (v 1).

It does seem strange, though, doesn't it? Instead of coming to save us with legions of angels and blazing chariots, our God came hiding in a womb! We see this "*hiding*" language in our text:

- Jesus would have a "*mouth like a sharp sword,*" but "*in the shadow of His hand He hid me*" (v 2a).
- Jesus would be like "*a polished arrow,*" but "*in His quiver He hid Me away*" (v 2b).

Sometimes God accomplishes His will visibly and powerfully – parting the Red Sea comes to mind, or the walls of Jericho tumbling down. But sometimes God accomplishes His will by hiding. That's how He accomplished our salvation.

Still, it does seem strange that God would choose to accomplish His will by hiding. It seems like such a difficult way, filled with humiliation, pain, and suffering. The Servant Himself seems to question the way of hiding. We hear Him in our text: "*I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity*" (v 4a).

But we also hear Him in our text: "*Surely the LORD is ready to do what is right for Me, and God is ready to reward Me*" (v 4b). Though the way of hiding isn't easy. But when it is God's way, then it is the right way, the necessary way.

III. Why a womb?

- It took a womb to equip the Messiah with the human body He would need to suffer and die and rise again for the salvation of the world.
- It took a womb as a necessary starting point to bring salvation to the world.

That leads us to our final point and our main point: It took a womb for the Messiah to identify with and bring salvation for all humanity. This is the message of Epiphany.

You see, Jesus didn't come just for a certain ethnic group or for people with a certain skin color or for people with a certain mental capacity:

- He came to be light for *all* the nations.
- He came to bring salvation "*to the end of the earth*" (v 6c).

In today's Gospel, John points to Jesus and says: "*Behold, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world!*" (Jn 1:29a).

As an embryo developing in His mother's womb, Jesus identifies with humanity at the point that is the very essence of "*sameness*." Therefore:

- You cannot look at an early embryo and discern whether it is male or female, black, white, red, or brown.
- You cannot look at an early embryo and know his or her intelligence or athletic ability.
- You cannot look at an early embryo and tell whether he or she will be a person with a particular disease or disability.

As embryos, we all looked exactly the same!

And guess what? Jesus looked exactly the same!

- Jesus looked just like all of you.
- Jesus looked just like people from Africa or the Near East or the Far East.
- Jesus looked just like people from Mexico or Guam or Russia.
- Jesus looked just like people in care centers and group homes and mental hospitals.

You see, as embryos in a womb, all humanity looks the same. Jesus came as an embryo in a womb to identify with *all* humanity, and to bring salvation for *all* humanity. That's the message of Epiphany. That's the message of Christ's Church all year long.

How negligent and unsympathetic we would be as Christ's Church if we were to exclude certain people from the message of salvation! Thank God we belong to a church body:

- That never says: "We're not sending missionaries to that country. You know how *those people* are."
- We never say, "We're not going to start a church in that part of town. *Those people* will never listen anyway."

No, we belong to a church body that understands that *those people* are people for whom Jesus died and rose again. We belong to a church body that boldly proclaims the message of salvation cross-culturally, to all nations, wherever and whenever God gives opportunity.

However:

- we do live in a country that still openly discriminates against a certain people group. This discrimination is so entrenched and so widespread that it can even deceptively draw God's people into its prejudice.
- We live in a country that says people not yet born are really not people and have no rights – including the right to life.

You see, after forty-seven years of this prejudice, many in the Church have forgotten the humanity of the unborn. And, without even thinking about it, exclude them from the message of salvation.

But Jesus did not exclude them! He became one of them. All humanity – red or brown, black or white, young or old, fit or feeble, born or unborn – is precious in His sight.

That is the message of Epiphany!

- This is the message that can change the course of this country when it comes to the value of human life.
- This message gives value to those not yet born and about to enter this life.
- This message gives value to those who are frail and about to leave this life.

Furthermore:

- This message gives value to the young woman in a crisis pregnancy, for it speaks of God’s forgiveness and love and strength. It assures her, she is not alone and enables her to make a choice that is best for her and her baby.
- This message speaks compassionately and gives value to those who have made an abortion choice and now are dealing with its guilt and regret.
- This message speaks to those who have made an abortion choice, as it does to us all, for we all have sinned. It says, “*You* are precious in His sight!

You see, Jesus entered a womb, lived, suffered, died, and rose again for *you*. Indeed, in His work of salvation, He made things right with God for *you*.

For God:

- In Jesus, forgives you all your sins regardless of number or magnitude.
- In Jesus, you have hope and peace.”

Conclusion: Dear friends in Christ: Why a womb? The answer is the message of Epiphany. God formed Jesus in the womb and called Him from the womb so He could identify with and bring salvation for *all* humanity. For the pre-incarnate speaks from our text: “*When I was still in the womb, the LORD called Me. Before My mother gave birth to Me, He pronounced My name*” (v 1).

In the name of ✠ Jesus, Who forgives all your sins. Amen.

To God alone the Glory!