

ZIONSVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

REV. JIM CAPPS- DECEMBER 23, 2012

"A SON IS BORN"

LUKE 2:1-7

Christmas is a season of surprises. There was a lady who was preparing Christmas cookies. There was a knock on the door. She went to the door to find a man, his clothes poor, obviously looking for some Christmas odd jobs. He asked her if there if there was anything he could do. She asked, "Can you paint?"

"Yes," he answered. "I'm a rather good painter."

"Well," she said, "there are two gallons of green paint and a brush, and there's a porch out back that needs to be painted. Please do a good job. I'll pay you what the job is worth."

He said, "Fine. I'll be done quickly."

She went back to her cookie baking and didn't think much about it until there was a knock on the door. She went, and there was the man with paint on his clothes and a smile of satisfaction on his face.

She inquired, "Did you finish the job?"

"Yes," he answered.

"Did you do a good job?" she asked.

Quickly he replied, "Yes. But lady there is one thing I would like to point out. That's not a Porshe back there. That's a Mercedes."

Quite a surprise, to be sure. But if you want to talk surprises consider the story of an elderly man in Phoenix who just before Christmas called his son in New York. Speaking with passion, the old man says, "I hate to ruin your day, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are divorcing—45 years of misery is enough!"

"Pop, what are you talking about?" the son says.

"We can't stand the sight of each other any longer," the old man says. "We're sick of each other, and I'm sick of talking about this, so you call your sister in Chicago and tell her."

Frantic, the son calls his sister and she explodes on the phone. "They're not getting divorced!" she shouts. "I'll take care of this!"

She calls Phoenix immediately and screams at her father. "You are NOT getting divorced. Don't do a single thing till I get there. I'm calling my brother back and we'll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don't do a thing."

The old man hangs up the phone and turns to his wife. "Honey, guess what? The kids are both coming for Christmas and they're paying their own fares. Isn't that sweet of them?"

While I hope none of you experience the kind of surprises found in either of these stories, from that first Christmas until today, Christmas always has been a season full of serendipitous surprises. Think about it. After hundreds of years of anticipation and waiting, a Son is born.

Let's read Dr. Luke's account of the birth of Jesus in Luke 2:1-7. READ.

A SON IS BORN AT JUST THE RIGHT MOMENT IN HISTORY.

For centuries the Jewish People had been looking forward with great expectation to the coming of the Messiah who would deliver them from foreign rule and set up a glorious new Kingdom of God. Little did they know that the night mentioned in Luke 2, when Jesus was born, was the grand culmination of God's activity in history.

As I have said often, the Greek word, "chronos," is the orderly measurement of time. "Chronos" is measured by chronometers, better known as clocks or watches. Another word for time is "kairos," which is the "moment of fulfillment," "God's special time," or "kingdom standard time."

After being ruled and in some cases exiled by the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Greeks, Israel was being controlled by the Romans. The Romans who could be ruthless and anything but God-fearing, were, unbeknownst to them, very much a part of God's plan for the world.

In his book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Philip Yancy writes that the Roman Emperor we just read about at the time of Jesus' birth, Augustus, brought great hope to the whole Roman Empire:

"More than any other ruler, Augustus raised the expectations of what a leader could accomplish and what society could achieve. It was Augustus, in fact, who first borrowed the Greek word for "gospel" or "good news" and applied it as a label for the new world order represented by his reign."

During this "kairos" time in the Roman Empire, there was what was referred to as the *Pax Romana*, or the "Roman Peace." With so much of the world under the rule of the Romans, huge parts of the world were at peace with one another. The Roman leaders allowed, for the most part, a system of self-rule wherever and whenever it was possible.

To go a step further, there was a common language spoken throughout the whole Roman realm. Even though each area of the world had their own language, most of the time, Greek and then Latin became the common language. Communication was possible in a way unknown in previous times in history.

Also, there were the Romans roads, which were better than anything known before. Like the impact of our Interstate Highway system, the roads of the Roman Empire allowed for transportation, travel, commerce and communication greater than anything previously experienced.

Do you see how it was just the right time, "Kairos" time, for Great King David's Greater Son to be born? The good news of His coming could spread more quickly than any previous time in history.

God's timing is exquisite in another way. Luke makes certain that we understand that there was a Roman census. While we take a census every decade, the Romans took a census every 14 years for the purpose of taxation as well as the military draft. In Palestine, a Jew could not serve in the Roman military, so it was strictly used for the purpose of taxation when the Son was born.

To go a step further, the census called for going to the headquarters of their ancestors or tribes. For Joseph, that meant going back to Bethlehem to be counted. The Old Testament Prophet, Micah had written:

“But you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” (Micah 5:2)

Do you get a glimpse of how it was just the right time in history for the Son to be born?

A SON IS BORN IN THE MOST SCANDALOUS FASHION.

The scandal, of course, is centered on Mary and Joseph’s relationship. It’s important to understand the three-fold process of how marriages took place in those days.

First there was the engagement phase that could last for several years. Often the parents of children would arrange for the marriages of their children. Like in many places in the world today, this custom would suppose that parents knew their children best and the best suited to find partners for them. While taken seriously, engagements could be broken.

The second phase of marriage was the betrothal, lasting for a year. Within the context of commitment, the couple would set up housekeeping together, but not become intimate. Unfaithfulness in this phase was considered every bit as bad as adultery and could be punished by death. Divorce was the only way to break this covenant.

The final phase was the wedding of the bride and groom when the whole community celebrated with them for a whole week, making them feel like royalty. It was not until this final phase that the couple was sexually intimate.

As we know by both Luke and Matthew’s accounts, Mary and Joseph were in the second or betrothal phase. If they had been in the engagement phase, they most certainly would have broken up and gone their separate ways. If they had been in the third phase, after the wedding, Mary would not have been a virgin.

We can only imagine the scandal of the situation in the eyes of the people there in Nazareth. Mary must have been an outcast, which may have been one of the great motivators for traveling with Joseph all the way from Nazareth down to Bethlehem at a time when the baby could be born any moment. Think about what riding on a donkey in that condition for three days over rugged terrain must have been like.

The place where the Son was born was also scandalous. With all rooms taken, due to the census, this One, who came as the much-awaited Deliverer of Israel, was born in a stable with animals. This was not according to the protocol of that day or any day.

Well-known Christian speaker and author, Ravi Zacharias in his book, *Questions I Would Like to Ask God*, writes:

“I have often referenced the quote by talk show host Larry King, in his response to a particular question: ‘If you could select any person across all of history to interview, who would it be?’ Mr. King’s answer was that he would like to interview Jesus Christ. When the questioner followed with, ‘And what would you like to ask him?’ King replied, ‘I would like to ask him if he was indeed virgin-born. The answer to that question would define history for me.’”

Ravi Zacharias then writes that when he requested permission through a common friend to quote Larry King, King sent word saying, “And tell him I wasn’t being facetious.”

Without question, King was right. The scandalous fashion in which Jesus, the Christ was born does define human history. God is the God of the impossible, which brings us to the next point I want to make.

A SON IS BORN TO FOREVER CHANGE HUMAN HISTORY.

In Luke’s Gospel, the shepherds from the hills of Bethlehem are the first to receive the birth announcement that a Son is born. On the socio-economic ladder of that day, the shepherds were definitely on the lowest rung. Just as his birth in a stable made a statement about God’s priorities, so this birth

announcement tells us that God highly values all people and not just the rich and the famous.

In Matthew's Gospel, which was written from a Jewish perspective, Jesus comes as the Savior for all people regardless of their nationality. In tracing Jesus family tree, there are foreigners in the list of his ancestors. In Chapter 2, the first people to pay homage to Great King David's Greater Son are the Magi or Wisemen who have come from another country. Ethnic and racial lines are crossed demonstrating the fact that God loves the whole world, even though Israel is His chosen people to whom He has related through the centuries.

Without a doubt as this baby becomes a man and shares the Kingdom of God with His world He continually overturns all kinds of tables of propriety and demonstrates what's important to God. He is Immanuel, "God with us" showing us how God feels about this world where we make our homes.

In John 3, 4, 5, Jesus powerfully tells us how God feels about human life. In John 3, he speaks sternly to Nicodemus, a prominent religious and political figure, telling him that he must be born again. If he is going to experience the kingdom of God, he has to be born again or radically transformed by the Spirit. All of his earthly power and prestige counted for nothing in God's eyes.

In John 4, Jesus surprises the Samaritan woman at the well by even talking with her. She is on the other end of the spectrum from Nicodemus. As a Samaritan, she is a half-breed according to any good Jew. She is an outcast to the Samaritans since she has been married five times and is now living with another man. While not condoning her sinfulness, Jesus treats her with dignity and respect showing her how she can experience the Living Water which can quench her spiritual thirst. Jesus gives her a new life which she in turn naturally shares with all who will listen.

In John 5, Jesus encounters a man who has been an invalid for 38 years and feels sorry for himself. Even though it is the Sabbath, he heals the man giving him a new lease on life. In so doing, Jesus infuriates the religious leaders who are more concerned about their traditions than they are about people.

Yes, this Son who is born has forever changed history even though He only preached, taught and healed for three short years. He was horribly

misunderstood by the misguided, paranoid religious leaders, causing them to execute Him like a vicious criminal. But, this Son born raised triumphantly from death to everlasting life proving once for all that He is the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. He is the One prophesied by the prophets of Old.

In the more than 2000 years since that Son was born, Jesus has continued to transform the lives of people who would follow Him as Savior and Lord. He has brought forgiveness to all who confess and repent from their sins. He has brought peace, joy, and meaning as people have navigated life with all of the trials, temptations and heartaches common to everyone. He has brought hope that there is a new day coming and it's just around the bend.

APPLICATION

While the world in which the Son was born, more than 2000 years ago, is far removed from our world, in many ways it is similar. That peaceful setting in Bethlehem was shattered by a maniacal king who had all the boy babies, two and under, murdered. Somehow it reminds us of Newtown, Connecticut where innocent children also were ruthlessly murdered.

While more than 20 centuries have seen stupendous advances in all kinds of ways, we still are just as much in need of that Son who was born at just the right moment in scandalous fashion.

Tim Keller is the pastor of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, New York. Listen to his words which speak profoundly to us in this season:

“Christianity does not so much offer solutions to the problem of suffering, but rather provides the promise of a God who is completely present with us in suffering. Only Christians believe in a God who says, ‘Here I am alongside you. I have experienced the same suffering you have. I know what it is like.’ No other religion even begins to offer that assurance.

After the World Trade Center tragedy, between 600 and 800 new people began attending Redeemer. The sudden influx of people presented the question, ‘What does your God have to offer me in a time like this?’

I preached, 'Christianity is the only faith that tells us that God lost a child in an act of violent injustice. Christianity is the only religion that tells you, therefore, God suffered as you have suffered.'"

Why would God be willing to come to earth with all of the pain and suffering and be as a baby born in a stable? Why would He be willing to suffer even to the point of death on the most cruel, barbaric means of execution devised up until that time? It all boils down to love.

Listen to these words from San Antonio pastor and author, Max Lucado from his book, *Gentle Thunder*:

"One of the sweetest reasons God saved you is because he is fond of you. He likes having you around. He thinks you are the best thing to come down the pike in a while... If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If he had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning. Whenever you want to talk, he'll listen. He can live anywhere in the universe, and he chose your heart. And the Christmas gift he sent you in Bethlehem? Face it, friend. He's crazy about you!"

In short, the good news in this season and every season is- You Matter to God! Is the feeling mutual? Does God really matter to you? This awesome and gracious God wants to matter to you. He wants to have a personal relationship with you.

There is not a better time than today, two days before Christmas, for the Son to be born in you. That can happen as you simply confess your sins, and then by faith, unwrap the greatest gift ever given, as you invite Jesus to be a part of your life. From the very beginning this is what God had in mind when He sent Jesus to live here on this good planet earth.

To go a step further, this morning can be a time when you come home for Christmas. Maybe you have stepped away from your relationship with God. Again, through prayer, right here today, you can come home. If you have been wandering off on your own, doing your own thing, He stands ready to welcome you home with open arms.

Today, maybe as you think of all that God did when the Son was born so many years ago in Bethlehem, you want to commit yourself anew to passing on that gracious love for others. In the next few months, we are going to be talking about tangible ways in which we can live out Vision 2020 here at ZPC. Are you willing to open yourself up and say, "God, how do you want to use me?"

If you would like to pray with someone after the service is completed, there will be people at the cross in the alcove to my right and they would consider it a privilege to pray with you.