

Christmas Service
2011

Sermon

Hobart

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INTRODUCTION:

I. WELCOME

A. THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN

1. When we have the exciting and joyful opportunity to celebrate and contemplate that miraculous, mysterious and revealing event some 2000 years ago, in the little town of Bethlehem, just outside Jerusalem;
 2. the birth of the Son of God, as one of us, One with us and for us
 - a) God come near to us, to draw us near to him
 - b) To include us in his life of love
-

S.P.S:

A. AS HAS BECOME OUR CUSTOM AT THIS TIME OF YEAR;

1. In our service today we will read through and discussing a number of scriptures describing this wonderful event in human history
2. And sing some of the carols put the story of Christmas to music
3. Towards the end of the service we will give our offerings, including our offering of prayer and thanks for Jesus birth

B. PRAYER

BODY:

II. ISAIAH 8:20-9:7

A. LET'S GO BACK IN HISTORY TO SET THE SCENE FOR THE BIRTH OF GOD INTO HUMAN FORM;

1. We could go back to Genesis, and talk about mankind's abandonment of God, going our separate way, to try to be our own supreme beings

a) And the subsequent pain and suffering that has resulted ever since

2. But we are going to start at the time of Israel's doing the same thing

a) Failing to trust in God, and be his faithful people

B. WE SEE FIRST THE PROBLEM THAT CREATED, AND THEN THE SOLUTION GOD PROMISED

ISAIAH 8:20-22 The Problem

²⁰ Look to God's instructions and teachings! People who contradict his word are completely in the dark. ²¹ They will go from one place to another, weary and hungry. And because they are hungry, they will rage and curse their king and their God. They will look up to heaven ²² and down at the earth, but wherever they look, there will be trouble and anguish and dark despair. They will be thrown out into the darkness.

ISAIAH 9:1-7 The Solution

9 ¹ Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory.

² The people who walk in darkness will see a great light.

For those who live in a land of deep darkness, [Greek version reads *a land where death casts its shadow*] a light will shine.

* Verse 9:1 is numbered 8:23 in Hebrew text.

* Greek version reads *a land where death casts its shadow*. Compare Matt 4:16.

³ You will enlarge the nation of Israel, and its people will rejoice.

They will rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest
and like warriors dividing the plunder.

⁴ For you will break the yoke of their slavery
and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders.

You will break the oppressor's rod,
just as you did when you destroyed the army of Midian.

⁵ The boots of the warrior
and the uniforms bloodstained by war will all be burned.
They will be fuel for the fire.

⁶ For a child is born to us,
a son is given to us.
The government will rest on his shoulders.

And he will be called:
Wonderful Counselor,* Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ His government and its peace will never end.
He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David
for all eternity.

The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies
will make this happen!

C. CAROL: UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN: (MICHAEL CARD)

* Or *Wonderful, Counselor*.

III. LUKE 1:26-38

A. WE ARE NOW GOING TO READ THROUGH THE STORY OF JESUS' BIRTH

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. ²⁸ Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

²⁹ Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. ³⁰ "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ And he will reign over Israel* forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

³⁴ Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin."

³⁵ The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she's now in her sixth month. ³⁷ For nothing is impossible with God.*"

³⁸ Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.

1. TF Torrance; wrote about what we learn from the way Jesus was born:

The birth of Jesus tells us that God acts in Jesus Christ in a way that his birth does not fall under the power of man... but that in his birth God the Son freely and sovereignly enters into them from without.

The virgin birth tells us that Jesus was really and genuinely the son of a human mother, that he was born as other men are, of woman, and yet in a *unique way* which corresponds to his *unique person* as the Son of the eternal God who has entered into our humanity.

* Some manuscripts add *Blessed are you among women.*

* Greek *over the house of Jacob.*

* Some manuscripts read *For the word of God will never fail.*

The birth of Jesus of the virgin Mary through the creative operation of the Spirit corresponds to the whole secret of his person and life and work, for it reveals in the most remarkable manner the way which the saving grace of God takes with our fallen humanity. It reveals God as the creator and redeemer actually with us in our estranged human existence, and as God bringing out of our fallen and sinful existence a new humanity that is holy and perfect.¹

2. God entered into our lives, into his creation from outside it.
3. He came to show how much he wants to be with us
4. To share our lives, to bare our burdens, and bring us into his life, to rescue and bless us and give us new life

B. LIKE MARY WE ARE CALLED TO PARTICIPATE AND HAVE A PART IN GOD'S BRINGING NEW LIFE TO OUR WORLD

a) To humbly allow God to work in and through us

2. Elisabeth Elliot talks about Mary; saying;

Let's think about that little Mary. ... Probably a teenager, because in those days Hebrew girls would be married when they were 13, 14 or 15. We see that little Mary as a simple village girl in a poor home in an out-of-the-way place. She's bending over her work, when suddenly the light changes. A dazzling stranger stands before her with a puzzling greeting. He calls her "most favored one" and tells her the Lord is with her. She is stunned.

I don't believe her thought is of herself, "Who am I?" or "Am I ever lucky!" Mary is troubled. She discerns at once that this has to do with things infinitely larger than herself, far beyond her understanding. What can it mean? The angel doesn't weigh in immediately with the stupendous message that he has been sent to deliver. He first comforts her. "Don't be afraid, Mary." He calls her Mary. She is not a stranger to him. He is assuring her that he has the right person. He explains what she has been chosen for: to be the mother of the Son of the Most High, a King whose reign will be forever.

She has one question now. Not about the Most High. Not about an eternal King. Those are things too high for her. But motherhood is another matter.

¹ Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*; ed. Robert T. Walker, IVP, 2008, p.98-99

She understands motherhood. She has been looking forward to it with great happiness. Her question is about that. "How can this be? I'm still a virgin."

The angel doesn't really explain. He simply states the mystery. "The power of the Most High will overshadow you." He goes on to tell of another miraculous pregnancy, that of her old cousin, Elizabeth, well past child-bearing age. God's promises can never fail, he says. They won't fail for you, Mary. Rest assured. ²

IV. LUKE 1:39-56

Luke 1:39-45

³⁹ A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town ⁴⁰ where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

⁴² Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "You are blessed by God above all other women, and your child is blessed. ⁴³ What an honor this is, that the mother of my Lord should visit me! ⁴⁴ When you came in and greeted me, my baby jumped for joy the instant I heard your voice! ⁴⁵ You are blessed, because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."

A. THINK OF MARY, HER SITUATION, HOW SHE FELT

1. What an incredible year she had experienced

a) There she was, an unknown, poor, young girl

(1) **Living in the midst of a people who had been taken captive, who had been downtrodden, and pushed to the side**

b) A people who lived in hope that one day God would do as he promised and send a Saviour, a son of David to rescue them, and bless them, and make them God's people again, living in peace and safety, and prosperity for ever

B. ELISABETH ELIOT CONTINUES;

² Elisabeth Eliot; <http://www.backtothebible.org/index.php/Gateway-to-Joy/God-Came-Down.html>

How will the girl respond? She is at once totally at the disposal of her Lord. She sees that the visitor has come straight from him. Whatever the mystery, whatever the divine reasons for choosing her, whatever the inconveniences, even disasters-maybe a broken engagement, maybe she would be stoned to death. ...Even the disasters which she may be required to face, her answer is unequivocal and instant. "Here I am. I am the Lord's servant. Let it be as you have told me."

We see her next with Elizabeth, who by the manner of Mary's greeting and by her own baby's sudden movement in her womb, knows immediately that God has chosen Mary to be the mother of the Lord. They don't sit down over coffee and natter about the gynecology or the practical logistics or what people are going to say. Mary sings her song of gladness, a thoroughgoing acceptance of the gift, of trust in the Mighty One.

The next time we see her, she is sweating in the cold of the stable, putting her own life on the line, as every mother must do in order to give life to somebody else. We see her with the tough shepherds, breathlessly telling their story of the glory of the Lord and the singing of the angel choir. Everyone else is astonished, a word which comes from "thunderstruck. But Mary doesn't join in the excited babbling. She is quiet, treasuring all these things, pondering them deep in her heart.

We see her with the mysterious travelers from the East, bringing their lavish gifts. She says nothing as they kneel before the baby she holds in her arms. We see her on the donkey again, on the roundabout journey to Egypt, because her husband has been given a secret message in a dream. She doesn't balk. She doesn't say, "Why are we doing this?" She doesn't argue.

We see her in the temple, handing over her baby to old Simeon, to whom the Holy Spirit has revealed the child's amazing destiny, a revelation to the heathen, glory to Israel. But to Mary, he gives a far deeper message of suffering, for there is no glory that is not bought by suffering. Her Son will suffer. He will be a sign which men reject. She, His mother, will suffer, will be pierced to the heart. But no question or answer from her is recorded. We know only her silence.

I love to think of Mary's silence. Do you realize that we know almost nothing of anything that she said, except when that first angel came to give her the message? She was silent. She was told when the baby was only eight days old that a sword would pierce her soul. You mothers know the

truth of that, don't you? That little baby, that precious little package, on the day that he or she is born, is the most priceless treasure that you can imagine. Yet that very child may pierce your soul someday. Suffering is part of motherhood, isn't it? Thank God for the willingness of Mary to be the bearer of the Son of God.³

C. O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

V. LUKE 1:46-55

A. THIS IS A WONDERFUL SONG OF PRAISE

1. Notice how she stresses her own, humble situation
 - a) And then goes on to praise God for blessing her so greatly with Jesus

v46 Mary responded,
"Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.
47 How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!
48 For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,
and from now on all generations will call me blessed.
49 For the Mighty One is holy,
and he has done great things for me.
50 He shows mercy from generation to generation
to all who fear him.

2. T.F. Torrance; calls the virgin birth "the pattern of grace" and the "model for faith." He wrote;

Grace takes a form in the birth of Jesus which we may take as a pattern or norm for all our understanding of grace. Here God takes the initiative and approaches Mary through the word of his angelic messenger—the word of his angelic messenger... she is chosen and told of God's choice.

She has nothing to do in this matter except what is done in her under the operation of the Spirit. What Mary does is simply to receive the word, to

³ Elisabeth Elliot; <http://www.backtothebible.org/index.php/Gateway-to-Joy/God-Came-Down.html>

believe, which she does not in her own strength but in the strength given her by the Lord, and she is blessed because of that...⁴

3. God's mercy extends to everyone down through the ages who look to him for help in the midst of their weakness

⁵¹ His mighty arm has done tremendous things!
He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.
⁵² He has brought down princes from their thrones
and exalted the humble.

4. Jesus was a baby, but he was God, and he came to be king

a) And he looks after and exalts the poor and humble, and deals justly with the proud and powerful who mistreat the lowly

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away with empty hands.

B. THROUGH THE BIRTH OF JESUS IT IS PLAIN THAT GOD BLESSES THE NEEDY, THE POOR THE HUNGRY

1. Elisabeth and Mary were both poor and humble

a) They feared God
b) They looked to him for help in their lives

2. It wasn't because of any works, wisdom, righteousness or position that God chose to bless and exalt them

a) It was purely out of love, through his grace and mercy alone

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel
and remembered to be merciful.
⁵⁵ For he made this promise to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his children forever."

⁴ Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*; ed. Robert T. Walker, IVP, 2008, p. 101

⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back to her own home.

C. MARY PRAISES GOD FOR HIS PROMISES

1. Especially his promise of mercy to all of his people down through the generations
2. Clearly, because of the joy and expectation of Jesus' birth, Mary celebrates, and worships and praises God
3. It is good that we also celebrate this wonderful fulfilment of God's promises to bless all people through the seed of Abraham
 - a) To bring mercy, peace, love, grace and joy to all who trust in him

VI. LUKE 2:1-7

The Birth of Jesus

2 At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. ² (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. ⁴ And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. ⁵ He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was now obviously pregnant.

⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. ⁷ She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

A. AWAY IN A MANGER

B. O HOLY NIGHT

VII. LUKE 2:8-16

The Shepherds and Angels

⁸ That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. ⁹ Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, ¹⁰ but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. ¹¹ The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! ¹² And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

¹⁵ When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶ They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger.

¹⁷ After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. ¹⁸ All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, ¹⁹ but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. ²⁰ The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.⁵

A. WHILE SHEPHERDS WATCHED

⁵Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Lk 2:17-20). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

VIII. MATTHEW 2:1-11

2:1 Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men* from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, 2 “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose,* and we have come to worship him.”

3 King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. 4 He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?”

5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote:

6 ‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah,
are not least among the ruling cities* of Judah,
for a ruler will come from you
who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’* ”

7 Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. 8 Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!”

9 After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! 11 They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

A. WE THREE KINGS

B. THE FIRST NOWELL (DOVESONG)

IX. JOHN 1:1-14

1:¹ In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

² He existed in the beginning with God.

³ God created everything through him,
and nothing was created except through him.

⁴ The Word gave life to everything that was created,*
and his life brought light to everyone.

⁵ The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness can never extinguish it.*

⁶ God sent a man, John the Baptist,* ⁷ to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. ⁸ John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. ⁹ The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. ¹¹ He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. ¹² But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. ¹³ They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

¹⁴ So the Word became human* and made his home among us. He was full of unending love and faithfulness.* And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

A. WHAT A WONDERFUL SUMMATION OF GOD'S LOVE AND HIS FAITHFULNESS TOWARDS US ALL

1. Jesus birth is clearly the greatest gift of all

a) God's gift of himself, to, and for us all

* Or *and nothing that was created was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything.*

* Or *and the darkness has not understood it.*

* Greek *a man named John.*

* Greek *became flesh.*

* Or *grace and truth*; also in 1:17.

B. IMMANUEL: MICHAEL CARD (LISTEN)

1. OFFERING:

2. Richard Crashaw; wrote the following poem back in the 17th century:

"That the great, angel-blinding light should shrink his blaze to shine in a poor shepherd's eye;

that the unmeasured God so low should sink as prisoner in a few poor rags to lie;

that from His mother's breast, He milk should drink, who feeds with nectar heaven's fair family;

that a vile manger His low bed should prove, who in a throne of stars thunders above;

that He whom the sun serves should faintly peep through clouds of infant flesh;

that He, the old eternal Word, should be a child and weep;

that He who made the fire should fear the cold;

that heaven's high majesty His court should keep in a clay cottage, by each blast controlled;

that glory's Self should serve our griefs and fears,

and free eternity submit to years –

let our overwhelming wonder be."

CONCLUSION:

A. LET'S TAKE TIME AT CHRISTMAS, AS RICHARD CRAWSHAW'S POEM DOES, AND MARY DID;

1. To wonder, to ponder the incredible event of Jesus' stepping into our world, born of Mary, born as one of us
 - a) Immanuel, God come to be with us, God always with us
2. And to respond as Mary did, with quietness, and thankfulness, and willingness to allow God to work in and through us to bless us and the world around us

B. TIME OF PRAYER:

C. JOY TO THE WORLD

D. PRAYER
