

“WHAT CHILD IS THIS? JOSEPH AND MARY’S SON JESUS.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Text for the Sermon: Luke 1:26-38; Luke 2:1-21; Matthew 1:18-25

Introduction.

People who study history talk about the year 1809 as a bumper crop year for babies who would influence and change the world. 1809 was the year of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, William Gladstone prime minister of England; biologist Charles Darwin; three famous writers, English poet Alfred Lord Tennyson, and American writers Oliver Wendell Holmes and Edgar Allan Poe; two inventors, Louis Braille who invented the braille writing system and Cyrus McCormick who invented the McCormick reaper; and world famous composer Felix Mendelssohn. What a bumper crop year for babies who would influence and change the world.

Baby of all babies.

This Advent season we have looked at the Bible's own bumper crop of babies. Four babies God used to influence and change the world and more importantly to prepare the world for Jesus.

During this Advent season we have seen how babies point us to God's plans in redemptive history. Isaac showed us our need for a substitute and a sacrifice. Moses delivered God's people from physical bondage, but we still need a Savior from spiritual bondage. Samuel was a priest who anointed kings, but Jesus would be both priest and King. John prepared the way for a Savior but he was not the Savior.

Jesus' birth is not only the hinge point of history, it changed the destiny of the universe.

“We do have to give Herod credit for one thing, he knew the potential of a baby. He was not so naive as to think a baby is nothing to worry about. Herod, by his hostility to a baby, showed the reality of the power of a baby. When God wants to change history He starts with a baby. That is why the Bible is so full of begats” (Glenn Pease).

This is a stunning story of the most incredible event ever to happen in human history. What sort of birth will the One before whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess have? As we have come to expect it is no ordinary birth.

Jesus reminds us of the great slowness of God.

I have a confession to make. I love competence and efficiency and expertise and skill. I love people who can make things happen and get things done. I like being able to check

off boxes, to see a plan coming together. I don't like slowness, I get impatient with lines and long holds.

God's plan of redemption and salvation in human history does not bear the marks of what I would call efficiency or timeliness. Efficiency doesn't appear to be a value to God as it is to me.

We have been pondering the slow providence and slow love of God. God thinks that nine months of pregnancy and years, even decades of growing up before starting their God appointed ministry is a good way to response to the prayers and cries for help and deliverance.

Moses was God's deliverer for His people from the bondage of Egypt, so why did God wait until he was 80 for him to start ? Samuel, John the Baptist and Jesus were thirty years old before starting.

What is up with the slowness of God, a God who delays, a God who takes detours, a God who takes the long way to get somewhere, a God who can be silent for 400 years? Where is His sense of urgency?

When God is cooking something up He much prefers a crockpot rather than a microwave. God is more interested in faith than efficiency, more interested in trust than the timeliness of the task, more interested in holiness than happiness, more interested in the long view and big picture.

Have you noticed with Jesus there was never one moment of impatience, of being flustered or frustrated, of being harried or rushed? He never said, "come on guys pick up the pace here, we're burning daylight, I have miles to go before I sleep, stop dawdling or falling behind."

You know who handles the slowness of God well, who handles the inefficiency of God best? Those who have absolute trust and confidence in the sovereignty of God who does all things wisely and well. Do you know who has the most patience? Those who believe God has all things under control, including all interruptions and changes in plans.

God uses babies to interrupt our lives, to chasten our pride, slow our pace, open our eyes, bend us toward dependence, and teach us to trust. He reminds us that He is not after maximum efficiency, but instead our conformity to Christ, to our being like a child (Scott Hubbard).

Jesus' Birth Story.

Jesus comes in a way that confounds worldly wisdom and human expectations. Let's look more closely at four brief statements in the angel's birth announcement. You will bear a son, He will be great, nothing is impossible with God, may it be to me according to your word.

You will bear a son, this is the great condescension and humiliation.

The second birth story in the NT moves us from the temple in Jerusalem to a small, obscure village in Galilee, Nazareth. In the mysterious and wise providence of God He chose a most humble beginning for the incarnation and birth of our Savior.

Jesus could have endured the condescension and humiliation of becoming man, but still been born to a rich or prominent family in Jerusalem or to a king. It is as if to add insult to injury that He is born to a poor teenager in an obscure village.

And then God pushes the humiliation to an even greater depth, what could be worse? To be born in a borrowed stable with animals. He emptied Himself of everything so He could give everything to us.

How many of us have ended up in places we would not have chosen for ourselves, in situations or circumstances not of our own devising? It is ultimately not about us but about God.

God has His reasons, His purposes, His plans that go far beyond anything we could know or understand. What looks bad to us is good to Him. What looks like misfortune turns out to be mercy. Pain or heartache becomes grace disguised.

A cattle stable became the birthplace of overwhelming grace and eternal salvation. God is exposing our hearts here and how we make much of money and the rich, when He doesn't.

II Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

He will be great, the Son of the Most High, His kingdom will have no end.

Have you noticed how much space the Bible devotes to the actual birth of Jesus? Seven verses. What do the angels call our attention to instead? The angel makes a stupendous claim about this unborn baby. Who could believe this?

Luke 1:32-33 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

His kingdom will not be like earthly kingdoms, not like Nineveh, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Rome, England, Germany, the USA. All have or will fade and fall and be no more. He will rule over all nations, over all flesh, to the ends of the earth. He will not only be the greatest ruler ever in Israel, greater than King David, but He will be the greatest ruler the world has ever seen. Every knee will bow and His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom.

Nothing is impossible with God.

Gabriel's final words should ring out loud and clear to all of us this advent season. We have considered impossibility after impossibility with each birth.

Isaac born to a 90 year old mother and spared at the last second from a sacrificial death. Moses escaping death by the Pharaoh's decree, and being raised even in Pharaoh's palace.

Samuel born of a long barren womb.

John born to a mother well passed child bearing age.

We should leave this advent season with a renewed and stronger conviction than ever concerning the kind of God we love and serve. He created the entire universe out of nothing, He spoke into existence all that is.

Nothing is too hard for God. If He has not withheld His own Son then what will He not do for us, that is good and perfect and wise and best?

There is no sin too wicked that the blood of Jesus can't cleanse it.

There is no heart too hard that the Spirit can't change it.

There is no work too hard that God can't bring it to completion.

There is no circumstance too difficult that God can't overcome it and turn it to good.

There is no mountain too high, no ocean too deep, no storm too strong.

God can break the power of sin, death and Satan with the birth of a baby.

Is not this conviction of the almighty power of God the answer, the cure for all our anxiety and doubt, questions and confusion?

The soul that believes by faith in the God who can do the impossible, is the soul that can sleep most calmly and peacefully, like Jesus in the boat in the storm.

May it be to me according to your word.

This is great faith. Mary must know what this will do to her reputation and integrity. The questions, the gossip, the slander, the ostracization and losing her beloved Joseph.

There is no greater proof of faith and trust than to bend our wills and our understanding without questions or objections to another, in this case to the Almighty Creator.

We must learn to quietly submit ourselves to the will of God even when the reason is not at all obvious and not be ashamed to do so acknowledging our ignorance.

Mary's faith is revealed and we see its depth in two things. *First*, she not only submits herself to whatever God desires, but *second*, she even desires what God has promised no matter how hard.

In God's plan only one woman out of countless millions could be the means by which God does this incredible thing. Truly she is highly favored and most blessed among all women. *But* there is also a door opened here for all of us, we can have a similar favor and blessing.

Mark 3:35 For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.

Luke 11:27 As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!" 28 But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

Mary's privilege is not just reserved for her alone, but is held out to every one of us. God intends for each of us to play a part in His great plan of salvation, showing and telling those around us of who He is and what He has done.

Implications and application.

I am always been impressed by homemade gifts, especially gifts that took hours and hours, even months and months to make. Have you ever received a gift someone worked on for months or even years? And when you receive it you are overwhelmed with the amount to time or effort or money, you are moved by the generosity, the care, the attention, the love. Don't you have some feeling of unworthiness, and that there is no way you could ever repay.

In the Bible you can trace God's love gift back to Genesis 3:15. But it goes back farther than that. God was planning and preparing this from before the foundations of the earth, from all eternity.

Someone asked little Tommy, "how do you like your new baby sister?" "She is all right," he said, "but there's a lot of things we needed more." There was nothing we needed more on that first Christmas than the baby Jesus. You cannot be shown more love than you have been in the gift of Jesus.

Jesus is the most elaborate gift, the most expensive gift, the gift with the most possible personal investment, the gift of all gifts that we needed more than any other gift.

Jesus is the center of history, Jesus is God's gift of gifts from before the world began, He is God's master plan for each of us. Everything in history says Jesus is the most important reality. He is meant to be the center of our lives, of our work, our marriages, our parenting, our souls.

The incarnation is cause for *worship*, which is why we are here this morning. It is cause for worship not just at Christmas but every Sunday, indeed every day. And it is cause for *celebration*, which is why Christians should celebrate Christmas better than everyone else.

Conclusion.

As I say at this time every year, now is the time to go to our houses for feasting. Go and enjoy and celebrate your Savior's birth. For all who believe you have a right to be very happy, He gave you the right to be the children of God and that is cause for rejoicing. Go and feast. In the words of Solomon, "Go your way, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart."

Let your faith give you great joy, for to us a child has been born, a Son has been given and He is Jesus Christ the Lord and we have beheld His glory. Glory to God and Amen.

Prayer: Holy Father of all joy, thank you for this day. Thank you for thinking of this day before the beginning of time. We can scarcely imagine how you stood on the threshold of heaven and said good-bye to your only Son to be born in a manger. Thank you for the indescribable gift of the incarnation of your Son. Thank you for making it possible for God and sinners to be reconciled. Thank you that by His birth we no more may die. May those who have been spectators stop holding back, and surrender to the truth and power of your redemption. All glory and praise belongs to you. Glory to God in the highest. Glory to the new born King. We love you Lord Jesus and we pray in your name. Amen.