

Jesus Christ is Born! 12-24-15

Lord, Jesus, come by Your Spirit we pray. Speak words of life to our hearts. We are in desperate need of Your touch. We are so grateful for Your miraculous birth. Help us to enter in to Your presence & find true joy. Amen.

We are here tonight not because we don't know the Christmas story – we are here because we do know it & it NEVER gets old. The goal, or challenge, then is to hear the story in a new way – at least in a way that will touch our hearts & cause us to walk in the assurance that the baby born in Bethlehem lives today, is approachable, & comes to you in love – it's a love that will calm your fear, heal your heart, & empower you to walk out your days confident of your value to God & others. It's a job too big for you, too big for me. We can't make our selves hear differently. God by His Spirit has to open our ears. May we not be closed to God Himself speaking to our inmost being. We pray, Come Holy S.

First of all, God is God & we are not. We didn't have anything to do with creation. When God created us, He gave us a mind & a heart. Both r necessary. Man has done unbelievable things w/his mind. Don't you find it amazing that you can be driving down a road in Rapid City, talking to someone anywhere in the country. Ask Siri a question, & w/in seconds she has a list of answers for you. Information at our fingertips, videos uploaded & sent instantaneously! It is amazing! Not to mention medical equipment, robots, drones! Some have put their trust in what man can do –

they see no need for anything beyond that. It's a tragedy. Also, hearts that can receive love, feel pain, & forgive are devalued.

People knock themselves out striving for more of what the world offers – believing “if I only had this, if I could only be that, if we had a bigger house, a better car, if I were famous, the list goes on... then I'd be happy. Well, happy is the one who finds out quickly true happiness isn't found in things, social status, money, fame, etc. It may be a bit disconcerting to learn that truth because if it isn't found there, where is it found? Those things look so good; those who have them look so together! And if you're still convinced that if you just tried harder, looked a little longer, you'll find happiness in the right thing, well, happy hunting. May you burn out sooner than later.

You see, God has a problem. He gave man an incredible brain. When used properly, the results are fantastic, extremely beneficial. God gave us incredible hearts. When functioning properly, the result is righteousness, peace, & joy. Hearts were meant to remain soft - soft toward God, soft toward others, & soft toward ourselves. But here's the problem: hearts get wounded. Long before children can understand what is going on, parents or teachers or friends say or do something that pierces a child's heart – abuse, putdowns, lies kill. The child doesn't know he didn't deserve to be treated that way. He has no safe confidant in which to confide. The wound never heals – it gets covered over w/coats of resistance, “I won't let that bother me. It

doesn't hurt. Big boys don't cry." Soon the heart is hard. The message of God's love bounces off – it can't penetrate. God loves me? If God loves me, why did bad things happen to me?

God is love. His #1 desire is that we would love Him w/our whole heart, soul, & mind. God desires to convince the brain-iac there is more to life. God longs to heal the broken-hearted. What would God have to do to convince you of His unfathomable love for you? Could He convince you so that you never doubted again? If you had seen the baby in Bethlehem, would you have been convinced that Baby Jesus was God's Son? A baby lying in a manger? The only ones truly testifying to this baby being Christ the Lord were shepherds who were told by angels. Would that have been enough?

Some people want to see miracles – big miracles! Then they'd believe! But notice what happened to people who witnessed great miracles. The Israelites witnessed the plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, 40 years of manna from heaven, and how long did it take them to become a group of grumbling, rebellious, golden-calf worshipers? The disciples saw Jesus perform many miracles – feeding of the 5,000, lame walking, the blind seeing. Peter, James, & John witnessed the glorious transfiguration of Jesus – they saw His glory! In a couple weeks, they & all of the disciples denied they ever knew Jesus. It seems that in the long run, miracles do not produce a deep abiding faith – they seem to have a rather shallow effect. It's not that we shouldn't desire God

to work miracles – I believe He wants to do that as well. Even Jesus said that if they didn't believe His Words, look at the miracles He had done. But just because we witness a miracle would be no guarantee that we'd never doubt again.

God had to find a way to convince man that he is the object of His great love. Soren Kierkegaard told this story. Suppose there was a king who loved a humble maiden. The king was like no other king. No one dared breathe a word against him, for he had the strength to crush all opponents. And yet this mighty king was melted by love for a humble maiden. How could he declare his love for her? In an odd sort of way, his kingliness tied his hands. If he brought her to the palace and crowned her head with jewels and clothed her body in royal robes, she would surely not resist—no one dared resist him. But would she love him? She would say she loved him, of course, but would she truly? Or would she live with him in fear, nursing a private grief for the life she had left behind? Would she be happy at his side? How could he know? If he rode to her forest cottage in his royal carriage, with an armed escort waving bright banners, that too would overwhelm her. He did not want a cringing subject. He wanted a lover, an equal. He wanted her to forget that he was a king and she a humble maiden and to let shared love cross the gulf between them. For it is only in love that the unequal can be made equal. The king clothes himself as a beggar and renounces his throne in order to win her hand.

For the very same reasons, Jesus left heaven. It wasn't a spectacular event in worldly terms – it was holy! Angels proclaimed His glory, lowly shepherds bent their knee in worship. You see, God desires what power can never win. Instead of wielding His powerful might, God took the slow, hard way of incarnation – the Word became flesh and lived among the people – full of grace & truth. (John 1:14) Because “God so loved the world, He sent His only begotten Son.” “He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of His nature.” (Hebrews 1:3). God is showing us who He is in Jesus. We will never be equal to God. But as we respond to His great love, love bridges the gulf between us and unequal becomes equal.

Think for a moment - if we feel superior to another, our relationship is one of looking down, condescending. If we feel less than another, our relationship is one of subservience – we obey but w/o true relationship. However, when we know that we are loved, we are free to give & receive. We can respectfully question because we know our best interests are at stake. We give ourselves whole-heartedly, which is precisely what God wants, because Jesus 1st emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men.

It is truly a miracle. God coming in the form of a baby! But it doesn't stop there! This is just the beginning! Jesus grew in wisdom & stature. He ministered to the masses. Ultimately, “Being found in human form He humbled Himself & became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him &

bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven & on earth & under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father.” Amen.