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## CHRISTMAS, KIDS, AND THE ISSUE OF CONTROL

Christmas has a great association with kids in our culture. It has a connection with kids in our church traditions, as we have just been reminded this morning. It has a positive tradition in most of our families. I certainly have many fond memories of the Christmas season from my experiences as a kid. Hopefully that has been the experience of most of you as well.

The Christmas story, after all, is a wonderful story about the birth of a baby. It was the evidence of God's love for mankind that He sent His Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, to be born in a manger in Bethlehem. It is, though, a story that involves danger and tension. That danger and tension was the result of the threatening world which He entered. It was a world not totally different from our own.

Our own world is often a dangerous world for kids. The pro-life people tell us that the womb of a mother is itself a dangerous place in which to be. Statistically in this country 18% of all pregnancies and 42% of all unintended pregnancies end in abortion. For children who enter this world divorce and broken families present threats and challenges. Our education system in Nevada doesn't have the greatest reputation. We are also close to Las Vegas which is known to have kids involved in the sex trade. Many of us are concerned by the unhealthy values and standards which barrage our kids today. These days we have to think about the possibility of our kids being shot at school.

Joseph and Mary also lived in a dangerous world. Jesus was born to a young couple who were probably only teenagers. It is doubtful that their families believed their stories about hearing from angels and having a conception from the Holy Spirit. Before the birth date arrived, Mary and Joseph made a three day journey to Bethlehem to be counted by the Roman government for a census. They probably had relatives there, but it was a challenge to have Mary's first birth experience in primitive conditions and apart from immediate family and friends. Many moms and babies died in childbirth. There were no medical facilities around. But, of course, Jesus and His parents lived through it and persevered.

There were also the divine confirmations. There was the story of the shepherds who showed up with reports about being visited by angels announcing the birth of a Jewish Savior. There was the visit to

Jerusalem a few miles up the road where two of these prophet-type people said strange and wonderful things to Joseph and Mary about this baby boy.

Then a year or so later, there was a visit by these wise men from the East. Somehow their analysis of the heavens told them that a great Jewish king had been born. So they traveled to Jerusalem to honor him. They went to King Herod, who was a vassal king serving under the authority of the Roman emperor. Herod didn't know what they were talking about. So he consulted with the religious leaders who told him about an Old Testament prophecy that a great king of the Jews would be born in Bethlehem.

So these wise men showed up in Bethlehem and found Jesus and his parents. They worshiped this baby and left the family with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. In the Gospel of Matthew in #2 we read, **“Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.’ 14 And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt 15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’ 16 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: 18 ‘A voice was heard in Ramah,**

**weeping and loud lamentation,**

**Rachel weeping for her children;**

**she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”**

This powerful king tried to kill the baby Jesus. A key issue for Herod was control. He was often afraid that people were out to take over his power and his position. He was married nine times and had sixteen children. He had one of his wives killed and at least three of his children knocked off because he thought that they were conspiring against him. Even as he was nearing the end of his life he was fighting to maintain control. So when news of the birth of this supposed king came to him, Herod felt threatened. He didn't know anything about this baby. He was not from his family. He was a threat. He had to go, better sooner than later.

We know that the religious leaders of Israel would also eventually feel threatened by Jesus. He didn't follow their rules. He displayed these miraculous powers, but He didn't accept their authority, and He

was developing a popular following. They were afraid that they might lose control. So they decided that He had to go. They were successful in having the Romans crucify Him. Ultimately this was according to the plan of God. Jesus was the God-man who had to die to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. But He rose again to demonstrate that His claims were true.

Jesus still presents a threat to us today. It is the same issue of control. If the claim of the Christian gospel is true, if Jesus really was God who became a human being who died on a cross to pay the penalty for our sins so that by faith in Him we can go to heaven some day, then he has a certain claim upon our lives. We have an obligation to give up control of the agenda of our lives to Him.

But that is difficult. We like to be in control of our own lives. By nature we want to be in charge. Yielding control to this Jesus might mean making changes in our lives, in our way of being, in our priorities, in our goals in life, in how we spend our money, in what we do with our time, in how we live our lives.

Such it is that much of the world around us would prefer Christmas to be about Santa and reindeer and snowmen and chestnuts roasting over an open fire. But at its foundation Christmas is about God who entered the world to deal with sin and to transform the world and provide us with a way to heaven. We can find that way if we will simply put our trust in Him as our Savior.

In C. S. Lewis's book *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Aslan the lion is portrayed as a symbol of Christ. At one point in the story one of the children asks about Aslan: **“Is he-quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion”... “Safe?” said Mr Beaver ... “Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you.”**

This Aslan, this Jesus, takes a young kid who has thoughts of going to law school and being a lawyer and maybe getting into politics and making a lot of money, and instead makes him into a pastor. Of course He hasn't been safe. But He has given me some great adventures, and He has been good.

Likewise He may not be safe for you. But He will give you some great adventures, and He will be good. The issue is whether we will let Him into our lives and trust Him.