

"A Child is Born"

Isaiah 9:6

December 9, 2005

17 Pentecost A

Good Shepherd Lutheran School Christmas Service

Boise, Idaho

Pastor Tim Pauls

The Word of the Lord from Isaiah 9:

“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given.” (Is. 9:6)

This is the Word of the Lord.

“A child is born.” We’ve had a couple of children born among our teachers this year, namely two little girls named Lillian and Luca. As a pastor, I call this “church growth the old-fashioned way.” And as a faculty and school, we’ve gotten to rejoice in the miracle of new life, the joy of watching a newborn’s first achievements, the beauty of a baby at rest and the amusement of those astonished little faces.

And beyond the joy and the wonder and the laughs, you and I also know this: a baby means a lot of hard work. Hard, unpleasant work at times. A baby means constant vigilance, 24 hours a day and seven days a week. It means humbling yourself. It means holding a screaming child when your head is splitting from lack of sleep. It means cleaning up all sorts of smelly messes in unimaginable quantities. You don’t have a baby to make your life easier. Infants are pretty much a ball and chain that restrict your movements and activities for years to come.

So many in our selfish world today will look at parents with wonder—not envy perhaps, but wonder—and say, “Wow. In spite of all the hard work, those parents still love their kids anyway.” But if you’re a parent, you know better: it’s because of all the hard work that you love your kids.

Many confuse “love” with feelings and emotions that come and go, but that’s not really love. Love equals hard work. That’s what I tell couples who are planning to marry. Love is the hard work of serving somebody else. The harder you work at serving someone, the more you’re going to love them. The more you love them, the harder you’re going to work. It’s not about emotion. It’s about servanthood. It’s about sacrifice.

This is why parenting teaches you about love. You get home from the hospital with a little blob that can’t move, can’t do anything on its own. From day one, you have to do everything for that child—even the most humbling of tasks, like the changing of the diaper. Because you serve your kids from that first day, your love for them grows. And when your baby is an angry, screaming mess at two in the morning, the sleep-deprived you doesn’t say, “How cute! Maybe he’ll scream for a while in my other ear!”; but you still help your child because you love your child, and you love your child because you serve your child. Despite those really bad moments where you want to put your child on eBay, even if you never get a thank you, you’re going to keep doing it. You may not be thinking perfect, holy, loving thoughts, but you’ll keep doing it. That’s what love does.

So we arrive at this Christmas program tonight to hear our children tell us the Christmas story; and those kids will begin by reciting Isaiah 9:6: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given.” Christmas is about the birth of a child—the Child born to Mary in Bethlehem. Christmas is also about love. It’s about servanthood. And it’s about humbling oneself to some hard, unpleasant work that needs to be done.

But this is where we get off track: we think it’s about our work, our service. Too often, the lesson of Christmas seems to be, “Because a baby was born in Bethlehem 2000 years ago, you should love and serve other people more.” I have to be honest: that rationale doesn’t make sense. Babies are born all the time. If that’s supposed to inspire mankind to greater works of love and service, to peace on earth and goodwill among men, then it doesn’t seem to be working out too well. Given the conditions around the globe today, Christmas would appear to be a gigantic failure if it’s about people selflessly serving other people.

So here’s the thing: Christmas is indeed about the birth of the Child in Bethlehem. It’s about love and hard work and humility and service. Not yours, not mine—but the Baby’s. Scripture declares that the Infant born to Mary is unlike any other child: because while Mary is most certainly His mother, Jesus’ Father is most certainly Almighty God Himself. Mary gives birth to her Creator. The eternal Son of God is now a few minutes old. The all-powerful Lord is wrapped up in swaddling clothes, immobile in a manger. The all-knowing Messiah has yet to discover His toes. It’s enough to wrap your brain into a pretzel. But it’s absolutely true.

So why does the Son of God become also man? After all, while you and I think that opposable thumbs are pretty cool, the limitations of a human body are quite the step down when you’ve been God from eternity. Why is Jesus born to Mary? The answer is love. Not your love, but God’s love for you. And remember, love equals hard work. It equals humble service. It equals sacrificial giving. That’s why Jesus is born.

While much of the world forgets about Jesus after His birth, He doesn’t stay in the manger. He grows up. He lives a life of perfect obedience to God’s Word. He lives a life of perfect service to those around Him. He teaches. He heals. He serves. He does all of this humbly. Think of it: if Jesus were to say, “I am the greatest, and I deserve all glory and worship,” He’d only be telling the truth. But He hasn’t come to be served. He’s come to serve...and He’s come to give His life as a ransom for many. You see, most of all, He’s taken on human flesh so He can go to the cross and die for the sins of the world—to die for you. And by His life, by His death and by His resurrection, the Bible declares that He has done all the work to get you forgiveness and eternal life.

December is a busy, hectic year; and with all the extra activities, it’s easy to grow annoyed with all that there is to do. (As you got home this evening, I’m betting that few of you said, “We get to go to a school program tonight? Excellent!”) So while you must deal with all that stuff to do, rejoice in the rest that the Baby in the manger brings you. He has not come to give you more work to do. He’s born to do all the work to get you into heaven. Unto us a child is born. Or, as the angels announce to the shepherds, “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

God loves you so much that your Savior is born. Your sins are forgiven. Heaven is yours. That’s why Jesus comes. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.