

“The Christmas Crux”

by Pastor Steve Hammond on 12/22/19
Text: Luke 2:1-21, at FBC of Newport, NH

//6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. ... On the eighth day ... he was named Jesus ...//

—Luke 2:6-7 (NIV)

There are so many amazing things surrounding Christmas. So many Old Testament figures foreshadowing the coming of God’s Anointed, so many scriptures foretelling the Messiah’s arrival, so many generations of Israelites looking for this Coming.

And when he finally comes, there are so many stories to tell around it. Zachariah and Elizabeth with their miraculous birth of John the Baptist, the angelic visit to Mary, the dream of Joseph.

At the time of fulfillment there are the shepherds, watching sheep and minding their own business, yet being at the top of God’s Christmas Card list for announcing the big Day. There’s also Simeon and Anna and the stories they tell days later as the new parents seek to obey the law. And, of course, there’s the Magi from the East seeking to worship the brand new King of kings. And King Herod’s jealous, evil plot to kill him.

But today, a few days before Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, I want us to ask the obvious. Instead of circling around and looking at all the signs and wonders surrounding Christmas, I want us to simply ask ourselves, What is at the very core of Christmas? What is at the heart of all the stories and all the celebrating that continues even to this day, two thousand years later?

What is the crux of Christmas?

It’s not like we don’t know. It’s just that, with so many other wonders around it, we may need to deliberately pause occasionally to keep this crux in focus, so we can wonder about this most wondrous thing of all.

Q. What is the crux of Christmas?

A. The birth of Jesus. The birth of God’s Son. Even the birth of God.

Q. What does this mean?

1. God experienced human birth. Or at least the stories.

ILLUS: Jim & Donna on North Haven Island, ME.

Now Jesus himself may not have had much of a memory for the experience of it, but others do. And just like the rest of us, his birth gives him a particular grounding to his life. If you’re born in Israel or Rome, or

America...; Hey, if you're born on planet Earth at all...; Then your life goes in a certain direction. If you're born in New Hampshire or Maine...; If you're born at a certain time ...; Then your life takes on a certain shape and path.

Jesus was born at just the right time and place for his life to please God. God subjected his eternal life to the confines of one particular human life born of one particular woman, in one particular place at one particular time. And yet those limitations were not a barrier to God's plan of salvation for a whole world and a whole race of humans. In fact, that particularity was the tool by which God accomplished his perfect work of redemption. For it is in this way, through the particular person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, that particular lives were touched and healed and fed and raised from the dead. And because Jesus did these things we can be assured of that same love and power and individual attention can be at work in our lives. That is, if we will believe in this particular kind of God and let him come to us and be born into our lives by faith.

God experienced human birth, so humans might experience God.

2. God grew up with memories of his hometown and family life.

ILLUS: Picture of Dad's office on Hunnewell Ave, Pittsfield, ME.

I wonder what kind of memories Jesus made in Nazareth? A tough town. One that he couldn't return to after he started his ministry. He experienced the proverbial "you can't go home again." Surely everyone must experience that in one way or another.

He also experienced a family life that wasn't perfect. He had at least six siblings, possibly nine or ten, and his father died young. Do you think just because Jesus was the Son of God none of that home life ever caused trouble or sorrow or was at times what we call dysfunctional today?

Do you remember the story of Joseph and his eleven brothers. How'd those family relationships go in the formative years? Being singled out for God's blessing can also mean being singled out for heartache.

Imagine Jesus' feelings when his family considered him insane, even getting his mother to go along with it for a while. Imagine his feelings on that cross when he saw his mother witnessing his crucifixion.

God experienced our sin, not only on the cross but up close and personal in his everyday life, and in ways that hurt like family.

But imagine his feelings when he showed himself risen. Do you think he had deeper feelings for his mother Mary than for Mary Magdalene? No. That's backwards. Anyone who does the will of God is his mother and brothers and sisters. He had as much love and joy for the one Mary as for the other. The same goes for when he saw his brother James finally

believe in him, as well as Saul of Tarsus or anyone putting their faith in the risen Lord.

3. God experienced a victory no other human had ever experienced before.

But there is one more thing at the crux of Christmas, which, unlike birth, was not a common human experience at all. In fact it was non-existent for any human, until the coming of this one, unique Man, Jesus. Only Jesus could break through for the human experience of victory over sin, victory over death and victory over the devil himself. I mean complete, in-your-face victory, not some kind of standoff.

Jesus lived and died that victory at the cross of Calvary. That, too, must be seen as the crux of Christmas. For if God had simply been born among us and yet never were to die among us and FOR our sins, then he might as well have been born on the moon or Pluto as an alien creature having nothing to do with the human race.

You know, prior to Neil Armstrong's unique walking on the moon no man had ever done such a thing, ever. Yet with that breakthrough, doesn't it feel at least as if all the moon has opened up for any of us to walk on it? Don't we believe that it will one day become commonplace for average men and women to walk on the moon and beyond?

(Fun Fact: how many men have walked on the moon? Twelve.)

Yet, which is more important: for a man to walk on the moon, or for a man to walk blamelessly with God? And how much more open is the invitation for that walk, now that God has walked on the earth? Even born as a babe, died as a man, and raised up in victory as Lord and Savior of all who would follow him by faith!

Jesus' victory was over sin and death and Satan himself. And his victory was as one of us, for all of us. Right now we can experience this victory by faith. One day, we will experience it face to face.

Concluding Thot:

God is with us as one of us. He could well have come to us like an alien race of Klingons, or simply as the Holy, Sovereign, Almighty GOD that he is. And then he could have overwhelmed us without our knowing what hit us, without our ever really being able to relate to him.

But he didn't do that. He was born in Bethlehem. He was laid in a manger. He grew up in Nazareth. And when he set out to save the world, he did so looking to save the world in which he was born, the world in which he grew up, and the world he understood and loved as a local.

Merry Christmas!