

December 24, 2013 by Steve Brandon



Christmas Eve Service (Various)

We have gathered this evening to reflect upon the birth of Jesus Christ. I find this interesting, because we hardly ever reflect upon the birth of anyone. We don't reflect upon the birth of George Washington. We don't reflect upon the birth of Christopher Columbus or Martin Luther or Genghis Khan, do we?

Oh, we might reflect upon our own births. Yesterday, my family was driving someplace all together, and discussion drifted toward the births of all of the children. Each of them have their own particular story. Hanna was born about 10 minutes after Yvonne and I entered the hospital. David was born into the hands of a nurse, because Yvonne's labor went so quickly. But, that's about all there is to tell about the births of our children. We don't spend much time really meditating upon the birth of anyone, except for Jesus. This is because His birth was so remarkable and miraculous.

Now, the birth of Jesus wasn't so remarkable because of its fanfare or anticipation. In fact, just the opposite is true. There should have been fanfare and excitement and joy. The news should have spread like wildfire in Jerusalem. But such was hardly the case.

Carol and Jimmy Owens described the irony well,

"How should a King come?
Even a child knows the answer of course,
In a coach of gold with a pure white horse.
In the beautiful city in the prime of the day,
And the trumpets should cry and the crowds make way.
And the flags fly high in the morning sun,
And the people all cheer for the sovereign one.
And everyone knows that's the way that it's done.
That's the way that a King should come.

How should a King come?
Even a commoner understands,
He should come for His treasures,
And His houses and lands.
He should dine upon summer strawberries and milk,
And sleep upon bedclothes of satin and silk.
And high on a hill His castle should glow,
With the lights of the city like jewels below.
And everyone knows that's the way that it's done,
That's the way that a King should come.

How should a King come?
On a star filled night into Bethlehem,
Rode a weary woman and a worried man.
And the only sound in the cobblestone street,
Was the shuffle and the ring of their donkey's feet.
And a King lay hid in a virgin's womb,
And there were no crowds to see Him come.
At last in a barn in a manger of hay,
He came and God incarnate lay.

The birth of Jesus should have been celebrated the world over. The savior of the world came to earth, and few seemed to notice.

And don't think that this was an accident by any means. Unlike anyone else who have ever lived, Jesus had an opportunity to choose how He would be born. When Jesus came to earth, He chose the manner of His birth. In Isaiah 7:14, the LORD said, "Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel." He would be born of a virgin.

But, not just any virgin. When Jesus came to earth, He chose His mother. When the angel visited Mary to tell her that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and she would conceive and bear a son, the angel said to Mary, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you. ... You have found favor with God" (Luke 1:28, 30). Don't think that God sent the angel to visit any woman in Israel at the time. She was hand-selected.

When Jesus came to earth, He chose the place. In Micah 5:2 it says that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem, a humble little city, "too little

to be among the clans of Judah"

When Jesus came to earth, He chose the time. In Galatians 4:4-5, we read, "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law." Jesus came when the time was ripe.

The circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus were no accident. It was the story that Jesus wrote for Himself. So, it is a worthy exercise to meditate upon the circumstances surrounding His birth. These circumstances were directed by the Lord.

When it came time for Mary to give birth to Jesus, there was no room for them in the inn, so they made their way to where the animals were (Luke 2:7). When Jesus was born, he was laid in a feeding trough (Luke 2:7). Very few understood what took place that night. Many were inside the inn resting, with no idea of what was taking place that night. The King of Glory was being born in the barn.

In the 1500's, Pieter Bruegel painted a marvelous painting entitled, "The Numbering at Bethlehem." The painting pictures a snow-covered village in which many people are outside doing various activities. In the center background, you see children having fun throwing snowballs at each other. In one corner you see children skating on a frozen pond. In the foreground, people are tending to their livestock. In the background, a wagon is being repaired. Quite a few people are walking across the snow in all directions. Quite a few are crossing the ice-covered pond, with loads upon their backs. There are several groups of people huddled together. The big mob of people on the lower left of the drawing are those who are registering for the census in Bethlehem.

The painting is so busy with people that you are hardly aware of the man leading a donkey with a woman on top, making their way to be counted in the census as well. The man is Joseph and the woman is Mary. There is nothing attractive about either of them. And unless you knew that it was them, you wouldn't even notice them in the painting. It is a good picture of what took place in Bethlehem 2000 years ago.

Many who had traveled to Bethlehem to be registered in the census taken which Caesar Augustus decreed (Luke 2:1), saw that night like any other. They passed their day like any other. They had no idea that God came to earth that day. It took an angelic appearance for the shepherds to come and see Jesus. It took a supernatural star to guide the magi to where Jesus was born. But many missed the birth of Jesus. Jesus was born in relative obscurity. There was no fanfare. There were no grand announcements to the world. The grand announcements came only to a few shepherds in the fields. Other than that, life went on as usual.

Jesus was born to an obscure woman in an obscure town with very little attention given to mother or child. Can you imagine all of the folks who lived in Bethlehem, asleep in their beds as this grand event was taking place? Can you imagine all of the travelers who stayed in the Inn that night, asleep in their beds, oblivious to what was happening.

Indeed, it was a "silent night." For very few knew what happened that night. Indeed it was a "holy night." For the Savior was born that night.

Now, one of the significant things about the birth of Jesus is that it set a trajectory for the life of Jesus. He was born in a humble manner. And He lived in a humble manner. In Philippians 2:8 we read that Jesus, "being found in appearance as a man, ... humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Certainly, the birth of Jesus was a very humbling moment for the king of glory. But such is the way that Jesus lived his life. He lived a life of humility. For 30 years, Jesus lived in obscurity, in an obscure city called Nazareth.

Isaiah 53 rightly describes his life.

Isaiah 53:2
He had not stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him.
Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

Just as his birth brought little attention to Him. So also, in His life brought little attention to Him as well. Instead, ...

Isaiah 53:3
He was despised and forsaken of men,
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
And like one from whom men hide their face
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

He lived a life of humility. He also lived a life of obedience.

And one of the ways in which Jesus was obedient is that He went to the cross. This wasn't an easy thing. In the garden, Jesus prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me;" In His flesh, Jesus didn't want to die. But, his life was one of humility, "Yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39). Jesus submitted Himself to the will of the Father.

And God's will, of course, was that He would be crucified. We can easily think of His crucifixion as something unique that happened only to Him. But that's not the case. You remember when Jesus was crucified, there were two thieves crucified with Him as well. One on his right. One on his left.

The Romans who ruled Jerusalem in that day were a merciless people who cultivated crucifixion into an art form, to inflict maximum physical pain on the way to death. And crucifixion was common in those days. And I'm sure that as Jesus was hanging upon the cross, there were

those who gazed upon Mount Calvary from a distance with a sigh, saying, "I guess some more criminals are being crucified today." And they went on their way. Many missed His birth. And many missed His death.

But, as common as crucifixion was, the death of Jesus was far from common. Yes, He died as a criminal, but Jesus was no criminal. He was the Son of God, who lived a perfect life for us.

In fact, that's why we come this evening to reflect upon His birth. Because his life was so extra-ordinary, and so was His death. Many missed His birth. And many missed His death.

But, did you know that His death will be spoken about throughout all eternity? The scene in Revelation 5 is of all heaven around the throne, beholding the Lamb who was slain. Forever in heaven, we will remember the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. They say, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9).

Jesus didn't merely die for Jewish people. His death was for "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). His death was for all who would believe.

Jesus calls us to believe in Him. That famous verse in the Bible, John 3:16, came from the lips of Jesus, Himself, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

We have come here this evening to celebrate the birth of Jesus. And the world practically missed His birth, because it was a humble birth. And there are many in this world today who have missed His death. Because they don't believe in Jesus. Because they don't trust in Jesus.

I call you this evening to believe in the death of Jesus. Believe that His death upon the cross was for your sins. And you will know eternal life. If you fail to believe and fail to trust in Christ, my friend, you are still dead in your sins.

His birth was humble, but it was extra-ordinary. His death was as a criminal, but it was extra-ordinary. It is sufficient to pay for your sins and for mine. So let us believe in Him. Let us worship Him.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 24, 2013 by Steve Brandon.
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