

Why the Lord Was Born on Earth

A Christmas Family Talk in Two Parts, by Rev. Michael Gladish
Mitchellville, MD, Dec. 25th, 2017

II.

When the angel told Joseph about the baby that his fiancée, Mary, was going to have he explained the situation very simply. He said, "...that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And," he said, "she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus." Why? – because that name is taken from a Hebrew word, Y'shuah (Joshua), which means savior, "...for He will save His people from their sins."

The angel also explained that this would be the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy that said, "they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated 'God with us'" (Matthew 1:20-23).

OK, so why was He called Jesus when He was supposed to be called Immanuel?

The answer is simple: God alone can save people from their sins and so in order to save us God Himself came into the world to be with us, **so** He is Jesus (our Savior) **because** He is Immanuel (God with us). He did not send someone else into the world to do something FOR Him; He Himself came into the world to do what no one else could possibly do. This is why in the recitation we read together this morning it is said that "His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father (and) Prince of Peace." These are all names for the one infinite God who was born as a little Child in Israel some 2,000 years ago.

He is wonderful because His love is so awesome we can barely comprehend it; He is our counsellor because He teaches us and gives us advice whenever we ask Him – especially in His Word; He is mighty, or as the original Hebrew word suggests, HERO because He did actually come into the world to fight for what is good and true in human life, and yes, He is God – **God with us**, the Everlasting Father who created and preserves everything and who was born on earth in order to restore spiritual order and prepare everyone for peace in heaven.

But let's think about what it means for people to be "saved from their sins" by the Lord. In another place (Luke 1:71, 74) it is said that He would cause them to be "saved from their enemies," so again, which is it, sins or enemies?

Well, in a way sins – the bad things we do – ARE our enemies because they really do hurt us. Not only do they bring bad consequences, they make us bad people. But the thing is, **our sins are not us**. They are the result of the bad decisions we

make. And just as we can make bad decisions we can make good ones *if we only know how and have the determination to do so.*

So the way the Lord saves us from our sins is by teaching us what we need to know in order to avoid those bad decisions and make good ones instead. At the same time He gives us the example of His own life in the world AND the benefit of all His help and encouragement since He also lived in this world and knows ALL about the troubles and temptations that can hurt us. He knows about them all and He has put them all in their place by appearing as an ordinary human being who could be tempted and abused but who actually had within Himself the perfect love and wisdom to make the right decisions and do what was good every time.

It may seem odd to say so, but in a way the Lord was the greatest possible “super-hero” you could ever imagine. Like other super-heroes you might read about or see on TV there were times when He looked perfectly normal and ordinary, and spoke and acted in perfectly ordinary ways. But then, when He was threatened, or when innocent people needed His help He was transformed into a Man so powerful that no one could argue with Him and nothing could stop Him. In fact, the whole idea of a super-hero comes from the Lord’s example.

This’s why in the recitation it says that “the government will be upon His shoulder.” He alone will have the responsibility and the power to govern, that is, lead people with true judgment and justice, truer and better than any judge or king or president or prime minister in the world.

Notice, though, that it says the government will be upon one shoulder, not both. Why is that?

Well, when people carry heavy things it’s common for them to put the weight on both shoulders, but when they want to use the full force of their body to *move* something or to use a weapon of some kind – like a sword – all the energy to do that comes from one shoulder. So the shoulder is a symbol of power, and in the Lord’s case great power to help us *push away* the bad thoughts that come into our heads and win our battles against what is evil and false.

This great power came to the Lord in His life on earth gradually, little by little so that it would not overwhelm people or make them afraid – which is one reason why He began His life like any other person as a helpless baby, and then GREW in His ability to teach and lead, but still, *faster, more fully and more perfectly* than any other person possibly could (TCR 89) because His soul was Divine.

II.

The very heart of the Christmas story is this manger scene. And in case you didn't know, the word, manger, comes from the French language, and means "to eat." So it is a place where animals, especially horses, might come to eat their hay or oats.

Why, then, was the Baby Lord laid in a manger? – Because natural food is a symbol and reminder of spiritual food, which is the knowledge of what is good and true that we need in order to grow healthy and strong as truly human beings. And since the Lord came into the world to provide that spiritual food for us He arranged this place for Mary and Joseph to have Him rest. Animals also remind us of our human affections or attitudes, and so when we are hungry for what is good and true in our lives we know we can always go to the LORD and find it.

By the way, Bethlehem also is a Hebrew name that means "house of bread," so even the city where the Lord was born reminds us of the spiritual nourishment that we can get from Him. And of course the swaddling cloths, which were usually long strips of linen wrapped around a baby to keep it warm and snug, also represent the simple truths of the Word that contain the love and wisdom of the Lord – truths that actually do satisfy our spiritual hunger and thirst.

But now... let's think for a few minutes about our lesson from the heavenly doctrine. There – remember – we learn first of all that the Lord has always existed but that before He came into the world in His own human form He used to appear to people in the form of angels who represented Him, acting for Him. In fact, all of heaven was organized like one great Man, and that Man *embodied* the love and wisdom of the Lord. For a long time these angels did a good job, in fact very often the people they spoke to thought they WERE the Lord, and called them Lord. But as time went by and people needed stronger, deeper, wiser teaching than the angels could give them the Lord determined to appear on earth Himself, in person, and teach them directly in new ways that they could understand.

So He arranged to be born on earth and to grow up among other people, just as if He were one of them. But He was never really quite like other men – or babies – because deep within His heart and mind He had a burning, passionate love for all the people of the world, wanting them ALL to know what was true and do what was right so they could go to heaven. He also grew up learning and understanding the stories and lessons of the Word more perfectly than anyone else could. Remember? – He was only 12 years old when He already knew more than even the best teachers in the temple at Jerusalem. So He glorified His humanity, that is, He perfected it, and in the process rejected, or cast out, all the impure and imperfect

thoughts that came to Him from the world around Him and from the worldly nature He inherited from His mother – not that there was really anything wrong with Mary, but like even the best of us she could only love and understand “so much,” whereas the Lord’s love was infinite and perfect from the start and His understanding grew until it *was* complete and perfect. That’s why, when He stood before Pilate at the end of His earthly life He (not Pilate) simply said, “Behold, the Man!” (John 19:5), referring to Himself as the only TRUE Man, the ideal Man, the Man of all men who could teach and show everyone what it means to be human.

And here’s why all this was so important: if He hadn’t done this work in the world no one could have been saved. What that means is that no one could have been **SAFE** from the attacks of the hells or really able to learn what is right and good in all the confusion of other ideas. The situation really was that bad. But since the Lord has done this we CAN find our way – with His help. He has shown us how.

Does this mean the whole world is a better place now than it was when the Lord was born? Well, in many ways it certainly is: people generally live longer than they did back in those days, and many of the plagues and diseases they had then are easily cured by modern science and medicine; most people don’t have to worry about getting enough food, shelter or clothing even though there are BILLIONS more of us today than ever before, and new things are being invented every day that make life more comfortable.

On the other hand, without the Lord we would know nothing about heavenly life or how to prepare for it; we would know nothing about the influence of spirits on us; and we would know nothing about how to deal with the selfishness that rises up in us and makes us think we’re more important than anybody else. So without the Lord in our lives, we are still lost and confused.

This Christmas, therefore, let’s all make a new and special effort to read, remember and do what the Lord has taught us. Let’s consider how the awesomeness and power of the one who created absolutely everything could be born in this world as a helpless baby with everything to learn, *and why*, and what this really means for us. Let’s be respectful to Him and honor Him on this special day by making sure to take some time by ourselves or with others to invite Him more fully into our desires and decisions, that His will may be done in our lives, as in heaven, so upon the earth.

Amen.