

# A Foretold Birth

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Well, this morning I wanted to hit the pause button on our exposition of the Sermon on the Mount for a couple of three weeks maybe and just consider some texts that are a little bit more seasonal, you might say, but those that are also foundational to our faith. And this morning I want to take a look at a very key text in Luke 2 and I would encourage you to open your Bibles and turn to Luke 2, beginning in verse 1, for a text that will set the stage for things here for us this morning, and we'll trust the Lord to bring an ever new freshness to his word as we consider familiar words today; we'll trust that by his Spirit, he will give us a freshness to that which we have seen before in Luke 2, beginning in verse 1.

1 Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. 2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. 4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, 5 in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. 6 While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Here in this text, Luke has given us a time and space account of the birth of our Lord Jesus and it's important to realize that he is referring to this and he is describing this as an actual time and space historical occurrence. Christ was truly born. He truly became man. He truly became flesh for us. And that is essential to our salvation. There must be real contact with humanity if Christ is going to redeem us from our sins. So as we discuss the nature of Christianity, as we discuss what it means to be a Christian, understand that we're not talking about mere moral principles or anything like that, we are talking about a historical occurrence that Christ came, Christ was born, Christ lived, Christ died, Christ rose again, and he did this for our sins in order to redeem us from our sins.

Yet as you read Luke 2, as you read it just kind of by itself there, it is showing things in a very understated way. It is describing things in a historical manner that would belie the greatness of what actually is represented in that manger and what I want to show you

today is that this familiar text in Luke 2:1-7 is actually just, as it were, the tip of a much greater iceberg. You're just seeing something on the surface in the whole revelatory context of things that are going on that open your mind to the greatness of what God has done in sending Christ. Beloved, we should always think of this time of year and we should always think of the birth of Christ from this starting point: that God ordained the life of Christ before the beginning of time so that when you read the account of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, that that is connected and that occurs in a much much greater context that you must bring to bear upon your thinking if you're going to grasp the fullness of what is being said.

So, for example, turn over to Acts 2, if you would. As you hear the so-called Christmas story read at any time, you should always be bringing it back to the greater context. So in Acts 2:22, for example, you see Peter saying to the Jews, "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know--this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." Jesus says, "This life of Christ, this death of Christ, was according to a predetermined plan of God; that what we read about in the Gospels, what we read about even in the infancy and birth narratives, is something that is the outworking of an eternal plan of God that was determined before the beginning of time." That means that as we read these things, there should be a sense of holy hush that comes upon us in the room and that comes upon you in the heart as we contemplate these things, and that we would resist the temptation to familiarity and that we would resist the sense that, "Oh, I've heard this before." No, the greatness of the material calls us ever again and again to a freshness of heart, a freshness of consideration, and a freshness of submission to this great Christ of whom this speaks because we are reading about something that God planned before the beginning of time and the fact that Luke describes it in such simple terms in Luke 2 should not distract us from the majesty of what we are reading.

In like manner, look over at Acts 4. In my own defense, Luke wrote Acts also and so that's why I tend to stumble on that, I think, because it couldn't be old age or a poor memory or anything like that. Acts 4:27, it says, "truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur." The life of Christ worked out according to a predetermined plan of God. It was what he predestined to happen. It pleased God to establish a plan and then by his sovereign power working even through the wickedness of men who did not know they were carrying out his purposes to accomplish what he determined in eternity past, he worked it out in time so that his purposes would be fulfilled in eternity future. This is the greatness of the Gospel. This is the greatness of Christ. This is the greatness of what we read about as we see this plan unfold in the history that Luke records for us.

So God ordained the life of Christ before the beginning of time and in the course of history, God did something else: God, before the coming of Christ through his servants

the prophets, predicted the coming of Christ centuries before it came and that's what I really want to send our attention to here for the remainder of our time here, and in two sections of this message to help you see the making of the prophecies of Christ and the meaning that those prophecies and the meaning that the life of Christ would have for you today. You see, it's an ever present battle for any minister of the Gospel to help people through the preaching of the word of God, to lift them out of the commercialism of the day and to lift them out of, to lift you out even of your own inclinations maybe to sentimentality, so that you would appreciate the grandeur and the glory of what we remember when we remember the birth of Christ. So we want to do that and try to do that this morning.

The making of the prophecies, first of all, if you're taking notes. As you read the Old Testament, you realize that God gave several predictive snapshots of the coming Messiah, of Christ who was to come. And I'm not going to take you to any text that you haven't seen before but just to remember that as we read Luke 2 as we did earlier, we are reading something that the prophets pointed to over centuries before it happened so that when we read this narrative in Luke 2, that there would be this sense of, "Ah, yes, this is what God said was going to happen. This is what God said was going to come and now finally it has arrived after centuries and even millennia of prophecies, now it is here," and you start to realize the magnitude of the moment that is in front of you as you read Luke 2.

Go all the way back to Genesis 3 and we'll just go through these rather quickly just to refresh our memories, really, of things that we have considered in the past. In Genesis 3, we realize that the prophecies of the coming of Christ started at the fall of Adam; that almost from the very beginning when Adam fell, having succumbed to the temptation that Satan brought to him and to Eve and God is pronouncing judgment, even in the judgment is embedded a hope of a coming Deliverer. Look at Genesis 3, beginning in verse 14 as God pronounces judgment on the serpent through whom Satan tempted man. In verse 14, "The LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life; And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.'" Oh, there would be a time when Satan struck a temporary blow, as it were, on the heel of Christ when Christ was crucified, but the greater reality was that Christ would come and crush Satan; that he would reverse the consequences of what Satan had done in instigating the fall of man; the time would come down the road when Christ instigated the permanent and eternal fall of Satan.

So even from the beginning, God was pointing to a coming Deliverer and when we read Luke 2, we see this Deliverer being brought to earth in human flesh and in Romans 16:20 this promise is repeated when it says that, "God will soon crush Satan under your feet." So even as we are mindful of the fall of man and the chaos that Satan wrought through the temptation, we realize that Christ has come to destroy the works of the devil as other Scriptures tell us and so we realize that from the beginning, God was implanting prophecies in his word that would point to Christ.

You move forward in redemptive history and you turn to the book of Isaiah, if you would, in Isaiah 7, approximately 700 years before the time of Christ, you read the familiar prophecy that the Lord was going to send a child who would be born of a virgin. Isaiah 7:14 where it says, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel." Turn over with that in mind to Matthew 1, keeping your finger in Isaiah, Matthew 1. You see, 700 years later in the birth of Christ, the fulfillment of the certain word of God. And once again, you see the fact that this is all proceeding on a divine timetable according to a divine plan that was certain in its fulfillment and we realize that we are watching the sovereignty of God carry out the plan of God in a way that is perfectly in accord with the time of God. Matthew 1:22 says, "all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which translated means, 'God with us.'"

So Scripture makes a point of helping us understand this birth of Christ in its context, in its prophetic context, giving the narrative that says, "These are the facts as they occurred in the first century," but always pointing you to realize that this is the fulfillment of prophecies that were made centuries earlier; showing that the word of God was certain in its fulfillment, that there was an underlying, hidden, unseen plan of God that was unfolding as Mary gave birth and placed that infant in a manger. So we realize these things and we step back from the commercialism, we step back from our own sentimentality. We step back from our sense of just loving the lights and sounds and the music of Christmas which is all fine as far as it goes, but we step back and we realize that there is something infinitely greater at stake in what we remember at this time of year. We remember that we are watching the unfolding of the plan of God take place as we read the narratives of the birth of Christ. And what does that do to you? Well, we'll talk about that more later on in this message but there should just be such a sense of the majesty and the magnitude and the greatness and the grandeur of what we're reading in such a way, beloved, in such a way that it would humble your heart; that you would realize that the focus on self that we all fall into would dissipate, would bow down; that you would reject your preoccupation with this life and let your preoccupation come with the coming of Christ; that your priorities, your affections, your desires in life would be changed by this because it is so much greater than any of our individual lives. It is so much more strategic, it is so surpassing beyond the things that we think about on a day to day basis.

Go back to Isaiah and turn to chapter 9, if you would. Isaiah 9, again, as we consider the making of these prophecies, as we remember the Old Testament prophecies that had taken place long before Christ was born. And in Isaiah 9:6, it says, "a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this." The great names of God being applied to this coming Christ, being

applied to this coming child who would be given to us, and the purpose of his mission, so much could be said, the purpose of his mission in part to be the Prince of Peace, the one and the only one who could bring peace to the nations, and his coming still future to us, his millennial reign on earth. The one and the only one who can bring peace to the darkened and sinful heart of man; who can bring peace with God to a sinner who is in rebellion to him. The one and the only one who can bring an end to the war of the human heart against God with his death, with his resurrection, with his gracious reconciliation of peace to those who believe in him. The Prince of Peace who will bring peace to the nations and who brings peace with God to his people. The majesty of it all. The greatness of it all. The eternal wonder of it all. This is more than a story about the birth of a baby. The birth of the baby is a reflection of the great eternal plan of God being worked out in human history in time and space, and only that perspective can rightly frame our minds as we contemplate what we read.

One final prophecy to consider in the book of Micah in the middle of the so-called minor prophets, the shorter prophets, you might say. In Micah 5:2 it says, "as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity." Do you see it yet again as the place of the birth of the Messiah is predicted 700 years before it occurs? That rooted even in that familiar prophecy, it says that his goings forth are from long ago from the days of eternity. This is rooted in the predetermined, predestined plan of God. This is not an accident of history, this is not one birth among many, this is unique to the occurrence that is necessary for the fulfillment of God's wise and eternal plan which he established within the councils of the Trinity before the world was created.

And so we have the sense that prophecies were made and now do this, if you would: put yourself in the sandals of a first century Jew who starts to read about these prophecies being fulfilled. Realize that, again, you're in the sandals, as it were, of a Jew thinking about it from someone who has been conditioned by the Old Testament to expect a coming Deliverer, to expect the Messiah to be born, and that there were these great markers that were in place prophetically so that he would be identified long before he came: that he would be born of a virgin; that he would be born of the line of David; that he would be born in the city of Bethlehem. And for centuries your people, for centuries your ancestors, your grandfather, your great-grandfather, your great great great great grandfather looked and read these prophecies and with a longing of heart anticipated what was to come, not quite knowing exactly how it would all play out but having the sense that there is one to come, and that is the spiritual inheritance that you receive from being a Jew. And then someone brings to you the Gospel of Luke and you start to read and you start to see things that tell you that these prophecies have been fulfilled in your lifetime.

Look at Luke 1:26 and notice how the simplicity of the New Testament narrative is packed with prophetic significance that you would miss if you only read these passages in isolation. That's the whole point of what we've tried to do here this morning. In Luke 1:26 which I read earlier, "Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a

city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary." You're that first century Jew and you read that and it leaps off the page. This is filled with prophetic significance. A child is being born to a virgin who is from the descendants of David, and all of a sudden all of the aspirations of your people, all of the prophetic significance of centuries gone by is being laid forth for you in a new revelation from God contained in the Gospel of Luke.

And you keep reading and you go to Luke 2:4-5 and you're stunned to read that, "Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child." You see, as we read that simple familiar narrative, it is though a bright spotlight is being shone to say all of the light of prior prophetic significant is being brought to bear upon this birth. Luke's narrative sums up the fulfillment of the prophecies. Beloved, when you read the so-called Christmas story, you are seeing the point of human history, nay, still more, you are seeing the focal point of the predetermined predestined plan of God in what you read. The makings of the prophecies is fulfilled in the birth of Christ.

Now, here's what I want to do, being a little picturesque in the things that I say today. I normally don't do that. Now what I want you to do is I want you to take off, as it were, the first century sandals of being a Jew and now to kind of flash forward, as it were, put your own shoes back on and say, "What does this mean to me here in the 21st century?" What does this mean for you specifically, not just that Christ was born, not just that, but that Christ was born in the outworking of the predetermined plan of God. That Christ was born in the outworking of a prophetic unfolding scheme through the progress of revelation now culminated now that you are able to read here in the 21st century in your humble life in this humble place in which we live and in this humble place in which we meet.

Point number 2 here this morning: the meaning of prophecies. We've looked at the makings of the prophecies, the meaning of the prophecies answering this question, directly applicable to each one of you: what does this birth which was foretold, what does this foretold birth mean for you today? What should you take away from this? What should frame your life? What should frame your thinking? What should frame your disposition going into even the coming week as people celebrate and remember things in completely different ways even within the room? We respect that, that's fine, but we're not talking about a modern celebration, we're saying how is it that you should think and respond to the fulfilled prophecies of the birth of Christ.

I'm going to give you five things kind of by way of application, really, but five things that shape your affections, that shape your thinking, that frame your approach to life, that frame the way that you look forward to eternity. What does this foretold birth mean for you today? Point 1: remember the cross when you remember the manger. Remember the cross when you remember the manger. And what we're going to do for this section, this half of the sermon, is we're going to turn to 1 Peter and just spend our time in 1 Peter to kind of bring the application and it will be obvious to you why. In fact, let me frame it

this way, 1 Peter 1 is where you need to turn your attention to. I'm going to put my point about remembering the cross on hold briefly and read a passage that I'll come back to again in just a few moments. But remembering that this birth was prophesied beforehand, look at what Scripture says in 1 Peter 1:10, "As to this salvation." What salvation? Go back up to verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." That salvation, the salvation that brought you new life, that brought you forgiveness of sin through the death and resurrection of Christ; that new life for which you bless the name of God; that new life which gives you a living hope, the fullness of salvation. That salvation is what we're talking about as we look at verse 10.

Look at it with me, "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow." We'll stop there for a moment. Here's what I want you to see to kind of frame these five points of application: Scripture makes a point of calling your attention to a reality about these prophets, the prophets who predicted the coming of Christ over a period of centuries. It says contemplate them and remember something about them that would frame the way that you respond to the overall gift of salvation that has been given to you. It tells us something about those prophets and that's what we're going to look at in just a moment but I want you to see that connection as we enter into these five points. I'll come back to it. Kind of a confusing way to do it but I think it will be clear in the end.

What do these prophecies mean for you as you contemplate and remember the birth of Christ? 1. Remember the cross when you remember the manger. Remember that you don't read this story in isolation; that you contemplate it in light of the entire context of the revelation of God, and specifically the whole purpose for which Christ came. As you remember the manger, you immediately make an inseparable connection in your mind for the rest of your life to come that you remember the cross at the same time because as Peter points out, it is that foretold birth that led to a predetermined crucifixion for sinners just like you.

Look at 1 Peter 2, for example, verse 24. Peter had said the prophets prophesied of the coming of Christ and his sufferings and he gives us interpretation of what that means. Verse 24, speaking of Christ he says, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." Chapter 3, verse 18, "Christ also died for sins." Verse 18, I hear you turning your pages. I'll give you a moment. Chapter 3, verse 18, "Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit."

Step back again, beloved, and remember the context of everything that we're talking about here and apply these verses in that context. Here we are, we are blessing God for the greatness of the salvation that he has sent. "Salvation" is a word that means

"deliverance." For you to be saved means that you have been delivered and from what have you been delivered? You've been delivered from sin, you've been delivered from death, you've been delivered from judgment that was upon you and the wrath of God abiding upon you in your unsaved condition. There you were apart from Christ, dead in sin, utterly unable to do anything to save yourself, and in the whole context of the work of Christ, what happened? Christ came for you. Christ came as a gracious gift from God and born in the manger with a perfect intention to go to the cross in order to bury your sins in his body; in order to give his righteous life on behalf of your unrighteous life so that you might be cleansed from sin; so that he, in the words of the Scripture that we just read, might bring you to God. That you who were not only a sinner but a Gentile sinner, alien and foreign to any of the promises of God that he made to his people, that Christ would reach out, as it were, out of the bounty of his righteousness, out of the bounty of his goodness, out of the realm of his perfect holiness, would reach out beyond that to you who were far off and say, "I will save you and I will bring you to God."

You remember the cross when you remember the manger. Christ came to the manger so that he could be crucified and, beloved, those of you that are in Christ today, you are the eternal beneficiaries of that predetermined plan that was prophesied through the centuries. You are on the receiving end of stupendous unspeakable grace. That's what we remember when we remember the manger, we remember the cross and the salvation that Christ came to achieve.

Secondly, what can we say? I wanted to put the cross front and center on that. Secondly, what can we say? The meaning of the prophecy is for you today in your 21st-century shoes: treasure the truth when you remember the manger. Treasure the truth when you remember the manger. Go back to 1 Peter 1. There is so much in Scripture that would humble the human heart that receives it with faith, that understands what is being said. To be in the presence of a holy God, to remember the love of Christ, is immensely humbling. It snaps the rod of human pride and just makes us bow down in gratitude and fear and humility before the greatness of God. There is something that you can add to that on a somewhat human level, you might say, as we look at verse 10 again, "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow." Pause there for a second and realize what this is saying about the prophets. God spoke through them and their prophecies are recorded in Scripture for us to study even to this day. And they knew, they were conscious that they had received a word from the Lord, but in their condition prior to the cross, they did not have a full understanding of everything that it meant. They gave their prophecies and then they gave themselves over to studying the word that the Lord had given them trying to understand, peering into the future with their own human minds, seeking to understand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that were going to follow. And these godly men, these chosen instruments of God, had this word that they knew was so valuable and that they wanted to understand and so they applied themselves to it but they were things that were a little beyond their grasp, a little bit beyond their ability to see before the cross.



So what did God show to them in verse 12? What did God make known to them in the course of their ministry as they had a hunger to know what it meant? "O God, what does this mean? You're speaking of a Christ who is going to suffer and who is going to have glory but, God, what does it mean? There's something more here than what I can grasp." Verse 12, "It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven--things into which angels long to look." Beloved, those great men of God, the prophets who suffered for his name, who received the word of God, who recorded it, Isaiah tradition tells us, sawn in half, Jeremiah rejected throughout decades of ministry, other prophets too numerous to mention, these great noble men of God were given a word that they wanted to know even as they suffered in their service to Yahweh. And as they searched that out, Scripture says it was shown to them that they were servants of a future generation, servants to you now on the side of the cross in the new covenant era. Servants to you, that you would have the benefit of their labors.

And what does that do? Well, we step back and we, first of all, we thank God that we have the Gospel. We thank God that he has sent the Spirit and has given us understanding that we might know him who is true and the one who has come who is true and that we belong to him is true, to his Son, Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life, 1 John 5:20, is where I'm drawing upon there. And we thank God for that and yet we take a glance back and we realize this, beloved, we realize that better men than us wanted to know the things that have been given to us and they were told at the time, "You're serving a future generation." And now we realize, "Wow, I'm a part of that future generation. I receive the benefit of the labors of men who went 3,000 years before me." And what does that do? What should it do in your heart? Beloved, it should make you treasure the truth is what it should do. The truth that is from God intrinsically valuable, the truth of Christ who is infinitely worthy of our praise, and as part of that, almost subsidiary to that, to realize that the men who gave it to us wanted to know. It was withheld from them and now we have it. And what do we do? We say, as it were, we say, "Lord, we are unworthy servants," and we kiss that word because we realize how precious its value is, in part measured by the men who wanted to know and they said, "It's for someone else to come," and here we are on the receiving end of it. That should make you treasure the truth because, beloved, you have a position of privilege that great men of God wanted to have and it was withheld. Here you are, 21st-century, in a comfortable room, and the truth has been given to you by God. The salvation of which the prophets spoke has been delivered to you and now you have it.

So what do we do? Well, we love it. We proclaim it from a pulpit and we proclaim it in our lives to those who don't know as part of the natural righteous gratitude that should come from being in a position to be able to treasure the truth when you remember the manger. That's what you do. I thank God for the certainty that many of you love the word like that. I ask for the sake of others: do you realize the treasure? Perhaps you've been indifferent or you just haven't seen it from that perspective to realize that this story in Luke 2 is not only true, it is a truth to be treasured with the deepest part of your affections because of its great value.

Thirdly, what do you do? What does this mean for you? You remember the cross, you treasure the truth, thirdly: you sanctify your heart when you remember the manger. You sanctify your heart when you remember the manger. Look at 1 Peter 1:13, that great bridge word, that great transition word that takes you from what has just been said to what you should now think as a result. As a result of the prophets who made prophecy and they were serving you not themselves, verse 13, "Therefore," here's what you do with that. Verse 13 says, "Therefore," in light of the prophets, in light of the Gospel, in light of this great salvation, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"

What do you do with the manger? How do you respond to it, those of you who trifle in sin and neglect the word of God and neglect the salvation that you claim to own for yourself? Beloved, what you do is you sanctify your heart and the greatness of the prophesied birth being fulfilled and the truth and significance of it having been given to you in this New Testament era, you say, "Oh, my life therefore is to be devoted to a search after holiness, after a commitment to holiness that reflects something of the holiness of the God who saved me. I cannot live for this world. My life cannot be centered on the affections and things of this passing temporal age. I have been saved for a greater purpose. I have been saved to live for the one who is holy and therefore I sanctify my heart. I set aside, I repent of, I reject the earthly priorities of fame and fortune. I reject the earthly temptations of lust and pride and I say that is not why I exist. I reject it all," you say to yourself, "and I'm going to sanctify my mind and without looking back, I'm going to set my affections going forward that my life would be somehow a mirror of the holiness of the one who saved me." You sanctify your heart when you remember the manger because Christ came in order to bring you salvation from a holy God. If you have received that salvation, then you say, "Ah, then there's nothing else for me to do but to give back. As God gave his Son for me, all I can rightly do is give my life back to him, that he would be the preeminent King of my heart, that he would have the preeminent claim on my affections and whether this life brings me riches or poverty, whether it brings me joy or sorrow, whether it brings me a great company of friends or whether I live in isolation, my heart will belong to this God who manifested himself in a manger." You sanctify your heart in that way.

Fourthly, what do you do? What's the meaning of this prophecy for you? Fourthly: you fear God when you remember the manger. You fear God when you remember the manger. This foretold birth prompts in you a reverent fear. A reverent fear. Look at verse 17. You see how all of this is just flowing naturally from the statement of the blessing of God on salvation, the remembrance of how the prophets brought it and set the stage for it, all of it just flows. All of these things just flow. Verse 17, "If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your

forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ." Verse 20, here again you see it again, "For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you." For your sake, beloved, he appeared. For your sake, according to a predetermined plan of God. For your sake, precious blood was spilt. You can't have a casual reaction to that. This is not a matter of light indifference. This is not something that you hear and say, "Okay, now it's time to watch television. Now I'll think about..." No, this stops you in your tracks. This is a showstopper for life to realize these things.

You know, my friends, when we contemplate these things, we realize that we are standing on the knife's edge between time and eternity. We are standing on the knife's edge between the life that is and the life that is to come. We realize that we are brought into a realm that shows us that our earthly lives are part of a far greater plan than what we usually think about, and it brings us to want to repent of the trivial way that we treat Christ and the trivial way that we give our affections to him, and the cold indifference that we slip into so often. And Peter wakes us up from all of that and says, "There should be a sense of fear with which you live your life." What kind of fear are we talking about? Simply this: a wholehearted life of humble worship in response to the great salvation that God has brought to you.

The Gospel comes to you and places a preeminent claim on your deepest affections and loyalties and says you must give your life to Christ as the only appropriate way to respond to this. There is no other option. Holding anything back is the most grotesque sin against God, especially when you realize that a day is coming sooner than we might think where you'll give an account for what you've done with that Gospel. And you say, "In light of the great value of it and in light of the greatness of Christ, in light of my sin, in light of the holiness of God, God, I bow before you in fear and reverent worship. I honor you. I bless you. My life belongs to you. I will conduct my life accordingly." That's what you do. That's the only proper response. Maybe better stated: a proper response has to include that as part of the whole response that you give. These are great eternal realities not to be trifled with.

There is a final thing that you do. We go out on an extremely high note, you might say. What do you do? What's the meaning of these prophecies? You remember the cross, you treasure the truth, you sanctify your heart, you fear God when you remember the manger, finally, number 5: you rejoice when you remember the manger. We sang earlier, "Joy to the world, the Lord has come," why joy? Why gladness? Why delight? Why this superintending and super-abounding gladness in response to these things? Why the joy that Christ was born in Bethlehem? Oh, beloved, beloved, your hope was born into that manger. Your peace with God was born into that manger. Your salvation was born into that manger. Your greatest treasure in life and eternity was born in that manger.

Look at verses 20 and 21 again, "For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you." For your sake, for your benefit, to help you, to provide for you, to give to you. This is why he came. "Who through Him," verse 21, "are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave

Him glory, so that," for this purpose, "your faith and hope are in God." All of a sudden all of the tragedies of life, all of the sorrows, the sins, the broken relationships, the lost friendships, the coming and going and reversals of fortune, all of it is put into a context that says, "It all diminishes in significance realizing that my hope," you say to yourself, "my faith, my confidence, what I am living for, is resting in God never to be taken away from me." A salvation has been given to you that includes an inheritance that you have yet to enter into. And the joy of being in heaven, the majesty of seeing the face of Christ, the certainty that the grave holds no power over you, that your sins will never be called into account against you by a holy God, he'll never do that because of what Christ has done for you. All of that realizing that this meager life is going to yield into glories far beyond your hope, far beyond what you could ask or think, oh, beloved, that's reason to rejoice, reason to be glad. To realize that you unworthy, have been saved by Christ worthy, given an inheritance far beyond anything that you could imagine, far greater than tongue or word could ever describe and that belongs to you and the Christ who began the work in you at a point in time in your life past is certainly going to perfect it until the day of his coming, the day when you enter into heaven, that's reason to rejoice. Your hope and trust are in him.

Beloved, is it possible for some in here today, that all of this discussion of truth has awakened you to the reality that you are not in the truth? That these affections are foreign to your heart? That you're still dead in your sin? Take this opportunity to come to Christ. Christ came in a manger. Christ is coming again in the clouds with great glory. Today, my unsaved friend, he comes to you through the proclamation of the word and invites you to come to him for salvation. That these great glories could belong to you. "Come to me," he says, "come to me and find eternal life, forgiveness of your sin in Christ." If you've heard it a thousand times but today it makes sense, today the light has come, that's an indication that the Spirit has awakened your heart, come to Christ and be saved.

Let's bow together in prayer.

*Father, we thank you for the great truths of the Gospel. We thank you for our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for your word which has not only recorded his birth, his Incarnation, but the significance of it. And we thank you that behind it all was a great eternal plan that only you could have conceived and put into motion and the fact that you conceived it and put it into motion means that you will most certainly bring it to pass. To know Christ is to be secure. To be in Christ is to have our sins forgiven. To be in Christ is to know that the next step in the outworking of the divine calendar for us is to be with Christ in heaven forever. Lord, we treasure this truth. We sanctify our hearts in the midst of it. We fear you. We rejoice in it as we remember the cross which followed the manger of that day long ago. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.*

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