

Advent 2014

We Believe Part 7

Today is the second Sunday of Advent. The time for Jesus' birth is getting closer, but did you ever hear someone use the phrase, "slow as Christmas?" "Grandma is slow as Christmas?" It expresses the thought of every child, "Will Christmas ever get here?"

When you are a child the waiting is difficult isn't it? Advent by its very nature is a time of waiting, a time of expectation, a time of hopefulness. A promise was made, a virgin conceived, a baby is coming, and because of the One who promised, we can say with certainty, "A Savior is born, Christ the Lord." But he isn't here yet. That's why we light the candles one at a time, preparing, waiting with a growing anticipation.

Consider those who lived in hope of God's promise yet never saw it. Abraham was told he and his wife Sarah would have a child and "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." God was telling Abraham that through one of his descendants a child would be born that would be the Savior of the whole world. The problem was they were childless. Talk about "slow as Christmas." Abraham and Sarah waited and waited but no child. Years went by and the promise remained unfulfilled but they continued to trust and believe. Finally, when Abraham was almost 100 and Sarah was 90, they became parents of a baby boy they named Laughter (Isaac means laughter or he laughs). A child is born, a promise fulfilled. Good news of great joy!

Advent reminds us we are to live by faith, certain of the One who promised, trusting in his faithfulness, even as we wait for the fulfillment of the promise. The day will come when our eyes will see all that has been promised. Advent says, "Keep the faith for God is faithful." As we ponder God's promise let's read responsively from Hebrews 11.

Reader: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for."

Congregation: "By faith Abraham, even though he was past age - and Sarah herself was barren - was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise."

Reader: "And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore."

All: "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance."

Hear the words of Jesus,

Reader: “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.” Luke 10:23-24. And from John’s gospel...

All: “The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14

Heavenly Father, how grateful we are for the gift of your Holy Son, that through Him we might have life. Lord Jesus, how blessed we are that what the ancients were promised we have witnessed, God in flesh, conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin, offering salvation and hope to all who trust and obey. The ancients lived in hope of the promise of your coming birth and they were commended for their faith. Today as we light the Advent candle, may we too live in hopeful response to the promise of your coming again. May we truly walk in faith, full of hope and expectation, ordering our lives so that at your coming we will have no cause for shame, but we will welcome you with gladness and rejoicing. In your holy name we pray, Amen.

We Believe Part 7

We are continuing our series of messages using the Apostles Creed as the basis for our study. The creed declares, **We believe in Jesus Christ; His Only Son, Our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.** In that affirmation of the faith we have the essence of our teaching concerning who Jesus really is.

Born of a virgin actually sums it up. Born implies he was a human, born like everyone else. As Harry Chapin said, “he came to the world in the usual way, but there were planes to catch and bills to pay.” We know Jesus was fully man. He was born of a woman, the way all human beings are born. He was fully human. He grew up in a family. He learned to walk and talk like we all did. He went to school, learning, growing, maturing. He wasn’t born walking and talking. He grew up, subject to the authority of his parents, honoring them as a son should. We know from reading the Scripture that he grew tired, weary, hungry, even angry. We know he wept, hurt, grieved, suffered, even died. We know he was fully human. And yet last Sunday I spent time sharing with you why we believe he was fully God. We know “born of the virgin

Mary” implies something totally different because virgins don’t have babies. Conceived by the Holy Spirit let’s us know just how different. Jesus was fully God and fully man.

Theologian and author J. I. Packer in his book, *Concise Theology* wrote, **“Jesus is one divine-human person in two natures ...the two natures are united in his personal being without mixture, confusion, separation, or division...each nature retained its own attributes. In other words, all the qualities and powers that are in us, as well as all the qualities and powers that are in God, were, are, and ever will be really and distinguishably present in the one person of the man from Galilee.” ... J. I. Packer**

Two natures in one man. But why did he have to be both God and man? The simple answer is, **Only one who was both God and man could provide our salvation.**

We could list other reasons why he became a man. He became a man to show us how to live in this world. Jesus was a man without sin. We are all born with a sinful human nature, but because he was conceived of the Holy Spirit he did not have a sinful human nature. He showed us what a human being should be, what a human being was intended to be, without the brokenness inflicted by sin.

He became a man to reveal the Father to us. We have said so often, in our fallenness, we couldn’t approach God, we couldn’t see Him or know Him, He was so holy, so above and beyond us. But Jesus became flesh so we could understand the Father, so we could know Him. Jesus said, **“When you look at me, you see the one who sent me.” John 12:45.**

But above every other reason, Jesus became a man to save us from our sins. But that takes us back to our original question doesn’t it? Why did he have to become both God and man?

Here’s the bottom line. **Salvation had to be achieved by God because no one else could do it.** We - men and women, couldn’t accomplish salvation because we were the ones who got ourselves into this mess to begin with. We have all sinned. Big time. My death couldn’t cover or compensate for my own sins, let alone for your sins or the sins of the world. I’m so guilty I would need to die a lifetime of deaths to atone for my own sins (and I know you, you’re no better.) Hang me and then hang me again and then prop me up in front of a firing squad and then give me a lethal injection. You still wouldn’t square the debt I owe. I’m a sinner so I can’t atone for sins.

Paul describes us pretty accurately in Romans 3. **“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away... there is no one who does good, not even one...Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Romans 3:10-18.**

That’s us apart from Christ. We are so lost we don’t even desire to be saved, let alone think of saving others. We suffer from the effects of sin to such an extent, so broken and scarred and messed up, our will so much in bondage to sin, we don’t even think about God. We don’t have the will or the power to save ourselves, to change, to seek after God.

James Boice said, **“If we are to be saved, only God, who has both the will and power to save, must save us.” ...James Boice** (pg. 289). Jesus, who was God in the flesh, was qualified then as God to save us. He alone had the will and power and qualifications to save us. So it had to be God that would save us, but...**Because it was man that sinned and man that deserved to die for those sins, no other sacrifice but man would be appropriate.**

Look at it. From the first family on, sacrifices were required and offered. The law of God had been broken and his righteous judgment had to be satisfied. Abraham declared to God **“Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? Genesis 18:25.** We know it is in God’s nature and character to judge rightly, to be just in all his dealings. If sin was to be forgiven and dealt with, it must be on a basis that would satisfy the righteous requirements of God’s law. His law required an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life. Justice demanded satisfaction.

The bible says “Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins,” so a life was required to atone for sins. God established a sacrificial system among his people Israel so that by the shedding of the blood of animals the sins of the people would be remitted.

Year after year animals were sacrificed, but the reality was those sacrifices were only able to push the sins of the people forward. I know you love your animals, but God’s reality is the life and value of an animal could not compare to the life and value of a human being because we alone were made in the image of God. Animal sacrifices were not able to truly satisfy the requirements of God’s law. Those sacrifices were only symbolic, they were only a shadow and type of the sacrifice that would eventually have to be offered. They were pointing to the ultimate sacrifice that would have to be made to atone for our sins.

The writer of Hebrews understood this. He wrote, **“The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming - not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”** Hebrews 10:1-4. Those sacrifices offered to God prior to the sacrifice of Christ simply carried the sins forward. Every sacrifice was looking toward the day when an adequate and appropriate sacrifice would be offered for the sins of all humanity, but the sacrifices of animals couldn't take away the sins of the people. Those sacrifices couldn't cleanse our conscience from sin nor free us from our bondage to sin.

The atonement for our sins would require more than the sacrifice of a goat or sheep or bull. Remember we said, **Because it was man that sinned and man that deserved to die for those sins, no other sacrifice but man would be appropriate.** And we also said **Salvation had to be achieved by God because no one else could do it.** Quite the dilemma. It had to be a sacrifice of blood that was not stained by the sin nature and yet it had to be a human being. The solution? Jesus Christ alone, fully God and fully man, would meet this criteria.

We have already established we were bankrupt. We could not pay the debt we owed. We were stained and scarred by our sins. So God prepared a perfect, sinless sacrifice. Look again at Hebrews 10. **“Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said ‘Here I am... I have come to do your will O God.’”** Hebrews 10:5-7

If you read on in verses 8-14, the writer explains that Jesus is saying, “Sacrifices and burnt offerings didn't satisfy or solve the ultimate problem of sin, although the law required the sacrifices to be made. It would take more than the blood of animals. Instead, Jesus says, “A body you prepared for me and I have come in the flesh to do the will of the Father.” Jesus has come in flesh, fully God and fully man, – the perfect, spotless, sinless, innocent lamb of God - God's sacrifice to atone for our sins. Only God/man could satisfy the requirements of a just and holy God. Only Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, born of a virgin and consequently without a sin nature – only Jesus could be that perfect sacrifice for our sins.

And so, on Calvary, the price for our redemption, our salvation was paid. The price paid by God himself. The Father giving the Son whom he loved. The Son obeying the Father and humbling himself, becoming obedient, even to death on the cross. “I have come to do your will, O God.” The will of the Father expressed through the willingness of the Son, **“And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”** Hebrews 10: 10.

No one else could do it. Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, the sacrifice that saves us from sin and makes us right before God. Look what he did for you. The Scripture declares: **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** 2 Corinthians 5:21.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich.” 2 Corinthians. 8:9.

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’” Galatians 3:13

“When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” 1 Peter 2:24.

“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed...but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” 1 Peter 1:18-19.

This is the reason he was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. This is the reason for the Incarnation, that God became man: it required a God-man to die for our salvation. Only Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man met the criteria to secure our salvation.

This is why he came. This is what Advent and what Christmas is all about. Redemption, the atonement for our sins. It is not just about a baby in Bethlehem, it’s about God becoming man so that through the nailing of his body to the cross of Calvary and his dying in our place, the sacrifice for our salvation might be made.

James Boice in his book *Foundations of the Christian Faith* wrote, **“Christmas by itself is no gospel. The life of Christ is no gospel. Even the resurrection, important as it is in the**

total scheme of things, is no gospel by itself. For the good news is not just that God became man, nor that God has spoken to reveal a proper way of life to us, or even that death, the great enemy is conquered. Rather, the good news is that sin has been dealt with; that Jesus has suffered its penalty for us as our representative, so that we might never have to suffer it; and that therefore all who believe in him can look forward to heaven.” ...James Boice

That is the full Christmas story. We said Advent is about preparing for his coming. Are you prepared? Are you ready for his coming? Have you made the Christ of Christmas the Savior and Lord of your life? You're only ready for his coming if you have come not only to the manger, but to the cross and received Christ as your Savior and the only sacrifice for your sins.

Charles Wesley's great hymn declares,

**“He left His Father’s throne above, so free so infinite His grace;
Emptied himself of all but love, and bled for Adam’s helpless race;
Tis mercy all, immense and free; For O my God, it found out me.
Amazing love, how can it be that Thou my God should die for me!”Charles Wesley**

We believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. Born to die that we might live eternally. Let the amazing love of Jesus capture your heart today.