

# **This Baby Changed the World**

**St. Mark Lutheran Church**

**Pastor Ken Welsh**

**12 Noon Service-Christmas Eve**

**Dec. 24, 2020**

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

There is a song that makes the following statement: “A baby changes everything.” If you have ever been a parent, it is likely that you agree with that. Sleeping habits change. Schedules change. Finances change, and your priorities in life change as well.

When we speak of how a baby changes everything, we are generally referring to his or her effect on family life. But in the next 24 hours we will be having four special services to celebrate the birth of the baby of all babies. We call this celebration “Christmas.” And we have a responsibility to proclaim what history strongly indicates is true: “This baby changed the world.”

The Apostle John neatly summed up this belief with his words in John 3:16 of the Holy Scriptures: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Some people when they hear that, may think something like this: “Well, Pastor, that sounds very good, but how do we know it is really true? After all, this is supposed to have taken place over two thousand years ago. A lot of the story can change in two thousand years.”

The evidence that Jesus is who he says he is, that he is the Son of God who came to take away the sin of the world, is overwhelming. First, know this, that evidence supporting his claim goes all the way back to the beginning of mankind. The first of the prophecies about a Savior to come is said in Genesis 3:13 long, long before Jesus was born. After Adam and Eve sinned against God, and brought sin and death into the world, God spoke to Satan and said this: “I will put enmity (hostility) between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring: he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.”

The Christian church teaches that this is the first prophecy about the baby Jesus. Notice the symbolism here. Satan and his followers would hurt the Lord’s heel; that is they would bring suffering and affliction to Him and his people. But there was a limit to the damage they could do. On the other hand, the offspring of woman would crush the head of Satan. An injury to the head is usually a much more serious wound. This baby Jesus would grow to be a man and defeat Satan through his death, burial, and resurrection from the dead. Satan’s ultimate destiny is a place in eternal hell.

The stunning thing is that this is only the first of over a hundred different prophecies that were given by God to his prophets from Genesis to Malachi over a period of two thousand years. Isaiah, Chapter 53, given about seven hundred years before the birth of Christ, has about fourteen different prophecies about the Savior to be born. You would do well to read and count them for yourself some time.

Then, closer to the end of the two thousand years, the Book of Malachi appears. God speaks to us through Malachi 3:1 and says this: "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come." That messenger is believed to be John the Baptist, who came to prepare people for and announce the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But that messenger, and that coming of the Lord to his temple, did not take place for another 400-450 years! Often, when God makes a promise, his people hope that God will soon bring it to pass or at least fulfill it during their lifetime. But that is usually not the case. God has his own plan and he has been carrying it out as he wishes, and he doesn't seem to be in a hurry about it. His plan covers all of human history, and he has sent a multitude of prophets and witnesses to confirm it during that time. If you don't believe in Jesus despite all this evidence, you have a problem. Not everyone is going to heaven. You and I have a choice. You can trust in Jesus' atonement on the cross for your sins, or you can step into eternity and meet God with your sins not forgiven.

So, close to a half century after God spoke through Malachi, God fulfilled his promise and sent a Savior for mankind. Our Gospel text for this service is from the Gospel of Matthew, one of the disciples of Jesus, and it provides some interesting details. Joseph was betrothed to Mary but had not had any sexual relationship with her, so when he learned that she was carrying a child he knew the child was not his. He was going to quietly divorce her, but an angel informed him to do otherwise. So Joseph stayed with Mary and he stayed with Jesus and he went on to have other children besides. He was still around to see this baby grow up and become a man, a man who healed a leper, a man who gave sight to the blind, a man who took a few loaves and some fish and fed five thousand people, a man who raised people from the dead! Plus, Jesus was a man who was followed around by thousands of people at a time. Why would thousands of people follow after a man dressed in a robe and wearing sandals? It had to be because he was a miracle worker, a fact confirmed even by some of the people who opposed Jesus.

Matthew's Gospel provides a link between both the Old and New Testaments. Matthew begins by tracing the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph, and the birth of Jesus to the virgin Mary. He quotes from many of the books of the Old Testament. In doing so, he solidifies the claim that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise of a Messiah. Matthew puts an emphasis on the "Gospel" or "good news" that God himself is present in Jesus Christ and lives to reign in people's lives. At Christmas we should be celebrating that God has offered us the greatest gift that we could have- the gift of Jesus!

Jesus stepped into human history and willingly laid down his life, a perfect and acceptable sacrifice to God the Father, to pay the debt for our sins. This baby would grow up and change the eternal destiny of every person on earth who believes in him. Jesus himself sums it up very clearly with his words in Mark 16, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved."

As important as that is, our eternal destiny was not the only thing that baby changed. He is not just waiting for us in heaven. He cares about how we are doing on earth. He can change the kind of person we are. The Apostle Paul, once an enemy of Christianity, was changed by Jesus and wrote about this. He said, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" There are millions and millions of people who could stand here this morning and testify that this is true.

Christ seeks to save us and change us because he truly cares about us. But there is another reason also. He seeks to use us to bring the good news about his salvation to others. This can be done in a number of ways. Certainly, sharing God's Word is very important. But other ways are important also. We can feed the hungry. We can console those who need comfort. We can forgive those who sin against us. We can reflect the love Jesus has shown to us, by showing care and patience to other people, even those we may not like. Then others may be more open to our message about Jesus Christ.

I ask you today, "What should be our reaction to all of this?" Let us take a tip from the shepherds. Let us tell the story; by the way we live our lives, let us show the story; and at this time in history, let us be part of the story. Amen.