

“All God’s Children Are Born in Bethlehem”

+ Christmas Day+

Isaiah 52:7-10, Hebrews 1:1-12; John 1:1-14.

December 25, 2014

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! The texts for our Christmas message are the lessons for this day.

A Preschool teacher told the story of Jesus’ birth “too well,” this year in far off, Marshall, Michigan where my friend Boedecker is pastor. You see, after she told the story of Jesus’ birth in Bible Time she asked her kids where they were born. And every last one of them was positively certain that they, too, were born in Bethlehem; not a hospital, but Bethlehem in Judea. And I guess that’s how one can tell a story too well. One can only wonder if they’ll be surprised when they see their birth certificates in years to come.

Then again maybe that little tribe of preschoolers was on to something-- “Out of the mouths of babes and infants” as they say in Psalm 8:2. If you really consider what happened at the Incarnation you must conclude that **“All God’s Children are Born in Bethlehem.”**

Perhaps it doesn’t matter what it says on your birth certificate. It certainly doesn’t matter to God because what happened on that long ago silent night is not only spectacular, but downright miraculous and it’s the gift everybody needs. That’s what the angel said, “I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day a Savior.”

Not everyone believes that, some get angry when you try to tell them they need a Savior and bristle at the very mention of Jesus, but truth remains truth. For a number of years now, I have seen and so have you, signs and cards and billboards that proclaim “Jesus is the Reason for the Season,” and I get it: Christians are disappointed how easily the greatest gift of all is left under a heap of tinsel, torn wrapping paper, ribbons that that get smashed, and will ultimately get tossed out.

“Jesus is the reason for the season” is an attempt to reclaim Christmas, but a few weeks ago I came across a different take on that and I want to share a little of it with you. The writer is a man named Paul Tripp and this is what he had to say:

“Every year my family gets together and we eat delicious meals and snack on tasty cookies. We watch classic movies, we give gifts, we share stories and we celebrate what the Lord has done.”

But then he went on to mention the first horrific tragedy of the New Testament, how after the Wise Men came to Bethlehem, King Herod turned his troops loose on the baby boys of Bethlehem killing them all from toddlers to infants, in the hope that one among them might be the “new born King of Israel”.

This author went on to write, “Jesus wasn’t born into a world of comfort and luxury. From the beginning of His life until the end of His life (in this world) death-violent, brutal, murderous death—was hunting Jesus. What’s so beautiful about Christmas is that the Son of God willingly came to a place where such unthinkable violence and injustice exists. And while he managed to escape the death sentence of Herod on this occasion as an infant, a royal death sentence would eventually fall on him again. He would experience a violent, gory, horrific death at the hands of wicked men.

“So as you sit beneath your beautifully decorated tree, eat the rich food of celebration and laugh with your loved ones, you must not let yourself forget...the slaughter that depicts how much the earth needs grace.”

I know it’s not nearly as catchy, and it’ll never make it to a billboard or a bumper sticker, but “sin and death is the reason for the season.” The dying and desperate world needed a Savior. It still does. And we got one that night long ago in Bethlehem.

“All God’s children are born in Bethlehem” because that’s where our lives get a fresh start, by faith in this little God-made-flesh as a tiny baby; there God rewrote the ending of all who would turn to Jesus by faith and believe – would receive Him as Savior and Lord.

That, I think, is what the writer of the letter of the Hebrews was getting at when he wrote the words we use every Sunday just before the Gospel, “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days, God has spoken to us by His Son...” (Hebrews 1:1)

All God’s Children are Born in Bethlehem,” because it is there that God “spoke” the last Word—the word made flesh to live among us.” Of course, that was then, this is now, two millennia later and while we like to think that our world is vastly different, and in ways it is, but

the human brain is still the same size as it was 2000 years ago. The Bell curve of intelligence has not changed – still the same amount, proportionately, of those on the genius side of the scale and on the other end (it has always humbled me to remember that my twin would have been on the exact opposite end of that Bell curve from me). Certainly we have not really thought of new ways to hurt one another – though now we can kill with unmanned drones. Proportionately there may actually be more refugees, more violence and war than there was at the time of Jesus – so disrupted is our world in these times and they did live in the Pax Romana – but then, as now, people feel an aching emptiness whether wealthy or poor, people search for someone or something to save them; from what they may not know, but no one who lives in our sin-sick world can avoid a taste, a healthy dose of its brokenness and does his or her own share of adding to it. Some things will never change this side of eternity.

But for us, we who have been reborn through the gift of the Holy Spirit giving us new life and a new birth certificate in the name of the one born in Bethlehem – we live forgiven, always loved always filled with hope and the peace that passes all understanding as we look to Jesus. All of us with an opportunity to play a part in what God began on that silent and holy night as we become angels – euangelos – evangelists and proclaimers – each in our own way with the gifts and talents God supplies.

I don't know if you remember the first time you learned the Christmas Story. At Bethany Lutheran School we sang the whole thing as a Cantata (I can still sing it from memory, but I won't). What is fascinating to think of is that Caesar wanted everyone in the Empire listed – named – so he could tax them. There was not one person on that list that wasn't a sinner – well, maybe there was one – the only One the world has ever known – if Jeshua Ben Joseph was added to the rolls in Bethlehem where Mary and Joseph had gone to have their names added. Jesus, the only begotten sinless Son of God came to live among sinners – to save all sinners of all time – to love and embrace all – high and low, outcast and elevated – for all need the Great Good News that to us has been born a Savior – Christ, our Lord! Amen.

Now may our precious Lord and gracious savior Jesus continue to be our “Emmanuel” God-with Us, in our hearts, in our homes and in our calling to love the world He came to save.