

## Christmas Eve, A ✕ D 2008

**Matthew 1:18-25** Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: <sup>23</sup> "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, <sup>25</sup> but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

*In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

1 In the year 5199 from the creation of the world, when in the beginning God created Heaven and Earth; in the year 2957 from the flood; in the year 2015 from the birth of Abraham; in the year 1510 from Moses and the Exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt; in the year 1032 from David's being anointed king; in the sixty fifth week of years according to the prophecy of Daniel; in the 194th Olympiad; in the year 752 from the building of the city of Rome; in the 42nd year of the reign of Octavian Augustus; the whole world being in peace; in the sixth age of the world; Jesus Christ, the eternal God, and Son of the eternal Father, desiring to sanctify this world by His most merciful coming, being conceived of the Holy Ghost, and nine months since His conception having passed, in Bethlehem of Juda, is born of the Virgin Mary, being made man. The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to the Flesh.

2 The Nativity of Jesus is not just a cute story. It's history. It happened. Two thousand fourteen years ago, it happened. God was born with human flesh. His mother was a virgin. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. He was born in the city of Bethlehem because the governor called for a census to be taken and his step-father, Joseph, was a descendant of King David. At His birth, angels tore the heavens open and announced to some shepherds keeping watch over their sheep at night that the promised Christ, the Messiah, was born. They would find Him wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Fairy tales begin, "Once upon a time." The Nativity of Jesus begins like this, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place this way."

3 And when God was born with human flesh, they gave Him a real name. "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for He will save his people from their sins." What's the difference between a Happy Holidays and a Merry Christmas? The name of the Son of God. If you're not in need of being saved

from your sins, you can't have a Merry Christmas. Christmas, after all, is for sinners who need to be saved from their sins. Anyone can have a happy holidays. But only sinners need a Christmas, let alone a merry one.

4 Lots of people celebrate Christmas. Lots of people believe in God. Lots of people even believe in Jesus. He's quite the popular guy. You can learn to eat the way He did and so lose weight. You can learn to teach the way He did and so be a successful junior high teacher. You can learn to manage your business like He would have, and so have a profitable business. But believing God exists does not make you a Christian. Nor does believing Jesus was born make you a Christian. Not even believing that Jesus is the divine Son of God makes you a Christian. Even the devils believe that God exists and that Jesus is the divine Son of God. They believe that—and shudder (Jas. 2:19). That God exists, that Jesus is God, that Jesus was born two thousand years ago: none of that does you any good if you believe it. And it doesn't make you a Christian to believe any of that.

5 But that they gave the cute little baby born to the Virgin Mother of God the name Jesus, well, that means something. His very name means, "He saves His people from their sins." Christmas is only merry if you need a Christ to save you from your sins. Which sins are those? Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm? These aren't imaginary sins, and they aren't slight sins. They're the sinfulness you inherited from your first parents Adam and Eve. They're the sins you have committed by doing what God has forbidden; they're the sins you have committed by failing to do what God has commanded. They're the sins that come out of your very heart, as the Christ Himself warns you: out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. They're the sins, of which St. Paul says, the wages of sin is death.

6 Death as the real consequence for your real sins. What's that do for your festive Christmas spirit? Do you really want someone to save you from your sins? Or do you enjoy your sins? Do you really need someone to save you from your sins, or would you prefer to manage your own sinfulness? A Savior from sins won't let you continue to dabble in your sinfulness. "Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep

on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother” (1 Jn 3:8-10). Merry Christmas, the Feast of the Nativity of Jesus, is for those who desire to be saved from their sinfulness.

7 This Baby whose birth we celebrate will return, and when He returns, all sin will be answered for. Either the One whose very name means “He saves His people from their sins” will answer for your sins, or the sins that you wish to hold onto you’ll answer for yourself. And you’ll go to hell. Repent.

8 A merry Christmas is knowing that the cute Baby in the manger was born to die. His very name confesses that He was born to die. His death is the only thing that can save you from your sins. Sins must be accounted for. And to save you from your sins is the reason for His birth. That the Baby grew up to die for sinners makes Christmas merry. That this Jesus saves you from your sins by dying on the cross makes Christmas merry. That Jesus’ life, the life of the sinless Son of God, was the only life capable of being the payment for your sins makes Christmas merry. This is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 Jn 4:10). This is love, that God would be born of a Virgin, delivered and placed in a manger, humbled to the point of death on a cross to pay for your sins.

9 That the Savior bids you partake of His body and blood in the feast of forgiveness, the Lord’s Supper, makes Christmas merry. It’s what the word means, after all, Christmas: the Mass of Christ. In this Holy Supper the One born to save you from your sins gives you His real Body and His real Blood for the forgiveness of your sins. This holy meal puts all your holiday feasting to shame. All other feasts are just celebrations, but this meal is the real thing. The One whose Nativity we celebrate gives Himself to you in, with, and under the forms of bread and wine. There can be no greater gift for Christmas—or any day of the year—than the Body and Blood of Jesus, which He gives you to save you from your sins. Merry Christmas.

*In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*Soli Deo Gloria*

Pastor Jeff Hemmer

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