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Christmas Eve – Luke 2:1-20 – Born to Save Us!

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Have you ever thought about why children are born? I'm not looking for anything biological here, but what are some reasons that parents want to have children? Back in the day, parents had a bunch of kids because it meant more helpers on the farm, right? Maybe today, parents think about having someone to love and take care of so that they'll have someone to love and take care of them when they're old. Maybe they're thinking about passing on the family name, or passing down their family traditions and heirlooms. Maybe they're just looking for someone to be there for their other kids as a companion and playmate. Or on the other hand, if you go to any youth sporting events, a lot of times it can seem like there are some parents who had their kids just because they want to live vicariously through them and feel that magic of victory again just like when they were young. There are lots of possible reasons why any particular baby was born.

But one thing's for sure: there's just something exciting about a new baby being born. It's a completely new start, a whole new blessing in your life that fills you up that much more with joy. And you know, I think some of the excitement comes from the fact that we see that child so full of potential. This could be the child that will cure cancer, or be a great president, or lead the Packers to another Super Bowl. This child could be great in so many different ways. So for the parents out there, any of those ring a bell? Why'd you have your kids? Or for those of you who are or were kids – have you ever thought about why you were born?

Well whether you know the answer to those questions or not, the true answer to that question is actually even bigger than what you or your parents might say. Really, God's the only one who can answer that question for us. So putting aside some of those less important reasons, why did God ultimately put us here? Well, go back to the first human life he made in Genesis 1. He said why he did it, remember? "*Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.*"

Your God made you, that is, you were born... to be holy and perfect, like God; to live with God forever, in total joy and peace and harmony; and to be his holy companion, so that you could love each other and give him all the glory he deserves. Now that sounds like a noble purpose for a birth, right?

Only problem is, that "Image of God" didn't last real long. See, God made Adam and Eve, gave them the Garden of Eden, gave them everything they could ever want. And as an opportunity to show their love and honor for him, he gave them one command – don't eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – and he told them that the wages

of sin for breaking that command was death. Well, they didn't trust him to know what was good for them and they took that fruit. They doubted God's love and they brought sin and death on themselves and every human since. They ruined their perfection because of their sin, and so also they destroyed their harmony with a holy and just God.

And that's a problem that we've all inherited. In fact, it's a problem that we've even perpetuated in our own lives, isn't it? God made us to be perfect in every way. You were born to be his *holy* companion, and, well, even on such a holy day as Christmas – I'd be willing to bet that you wouldn't pick the word "holy" to describe getting your family dressed and ready to come here and making it on time and all the other preparations you've made in these last weeks and months, from decorations, to presents, to parties, to pictures, to the short fuse you get with your family when stress levels rise, to *having* to go to church so much this time of year. I'm sure we all know what I'm talking about. We aren't holy. We aren't living up to our purpose – the reason for which we were born. And then add to that all the times we go in the absolute opposite direction and do exactly what God tells us not to do. Now think about what all that means for our relationship with God.

More disappointing than the kid that doesn't win the championship for his dad who never grew out of his teenage sporting career, more crushing than the kid who rebels against his parents and ends up in jail, worse than any kid failing to meet the high expectations and bright potential that others saw in him – our failures mean we don't meet God's demands. Our sins have earned every bit of suffering and pain that we go through in this world and ultimately death in its most terrible form – separation from God forever, eternal punishment in hell.

And that, my friends, is why Christmas is such a big deal. It's a big deal first of all because it's the birth of God's Son into this world. The holy maker and preserver of the universe sent his own Son to be one of us. God came to earth. The LORD who holds the planets in their courses and the stars in their places left behind the eternal glory of heaven to become our substitute, to take our place, to become so weak and fragile that he couldn't walk or talk or even hold his head up. God became man, just like you and me.

That's mind blowing. But it's even a bigger deal because of the *reason* he was born. This baby was born not to win a national championship or cure cancer, not to fix hunger or end war – but to do away with sin, which was the cause of it all. You see, God's presence with us wouldn't *emphasize*, wouldn't *exacerbate* the gulf between us; no rather, it was meant to *span* that gulf and bring us back together again.

God became man – not born in the palace of Herod or Caesar Augustus, because he wasn't born to rule. He wasn't born in the lap of luxury because the purpose of his birth wasn't to be treated as he deserved. He was born in Bethlehem because that's what God promised through the prophets, to a descendant of Adam and Abraham and David. He was born and placed in a borrowed bed because he came to serve and to suffer, not to show off. God himself was wrapped in cloths and put to sleep in a manger, in a feeding trough among the smells of dirt and manure and filth – all because of why he was born.

He was born to be our Substitute, and he was born to be our Savior. Yes, Jesus was born to *save* us. He was born to take our place and feel the pain our mistakes brought on. He was born to do what we can't – obey God's law perfectly, and he was born to pay for the times that we don't. Jesus was born to save us, and so that means he was born to *die* for us.

And every detail in our text proclaims that. The God who plays kings and emperors like pawns on a chess board had Caesar Augustus move the world's population with this census so that Scripture's prophecy would be fulfilled and David's greatest descendant would be born in Bethlehem. That's the kind of power this helpless child gave up to be born there. And even with that great family name, God sent his son to some of David's lowliest children – to Mary and Joseph, who came from a one-horse town like Nazareth, who couldn't even find a room to stay that night for a mother in labor, and who couldn't afford so much as a lamb to dedicate him at the temple eight days later, so that what Isaiah said about that child would be true – *“He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him.”*

And look at how simply this birth is described: *“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”* Such simple words, such a simple scene, the beginning of a long, hard journey that would be completed 33 years later in much the same way, as this baby's now grown, helpless body is carried from the cross, wrapped in linen cloths, and placed in a borrowed bed, the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

See again, this child was born to save us, and so this child was born to die for us. Even the angel's announcement to the shepherds points to that purpose: *“today in the town of David, a Savior (that is, the one who would save us from sin and death) has been born to you (that is, just for you, as one of you, to identify with you and redeem you); he is Christ (the deliverer God promised his people) the Lord (that is, God himself, come to bring us salvation). This will be the sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”* The sign that our Savior had come was that God humbled himself to be one with us. The sign was the cloths and the borrowed bed in a stable – the lowly beginning of a lowly life. That's the

sign that this child was born not to be served, but to serve and to die – because that's what it took to save us.

See, we humans of every time and place have tried so many ways to deal with our failures – from denying them, to trying to blame someone else, to making excuses and trying to rationalize everything – but our efforts that way just don't work – they *can't*. Even trying our best to be good can't fix our problem of sin, can't make our sins go away. We were born to be perfect, to live with God forever, but we aren't. We've fallen short. We've failed.

So that's why Christmas happened. This baby was born to rescue us from what our sins had coming, to deliver us from the guilt and shame and every evil that our mistakes bring into our lives. Jesus was born to save us from *hell* no less, and praise God that's exactly what he's done for us now. By his perfect life as our substitute, he kept God's Law flawlessly for us and gave us the credit for it, so now when God looks at us he sees those perfect, holy, loving companions that he always meant us to be. And by his death on the cross, Jesus took away your sins, defeated death and the devil, slammed shut the doors to hell, threw open the doors to heaven, and promises you that whoever believes in him shall not perish but shall have eternal life – whoever believes in him will be with him there in Paradise forever. Now that's a birth worth celebrating, wouldn't you say?

So then, let's go back to where we started. Why were you born? Here, to your parents, into this world – why were you born? Well, all the details of your birth and life would say that you were born to die – that was the price tag hanging over you for your sinfulness. But God's love changed that.

Christmas changed that. This baby, God's Son, the sinless, perfect Son of the virgin Mary was born to die in your place so that you will live; so that your faith in Him means life forever for you; so that your guilt is gone, never to return; and so that you are perfect and perfectly suited to live with your God in heaven for all eternity. You were born to live because the Christ-child, our Lord Jesus, was born to save us. So people of God, merry Christmas! Amen.

Christmas Eve Sunday School Children's Service

But before we go on, let's go back to that picture of a child for a moment, because that's really why we're here. We're here to listen to these children share with us the truth of the Christmas story, and most of all we're here to worship the Christ-child, our newborn Savior. Children bring us a special joy, and every time a new one comes into our world, we can't help but get excited. And I think some of the excitement comes from the fact that we see that child so full of potential. This could be the child that will cure cancer, or be a great president, or lead the Packers to another Super Bowl. This child could be great in so many different ways.

But if *that's* all we were celebrating here today, that wouldn't be nearly great enough to do this child justice. See, *this* baby was born not to win a national championship or cure cancer, not to fix hunger or end war – but to do away with sin, which was the cause of it all.

This Christ-child Jesus was born to be our Substitute, and he was born to be our Savior. Yes, Jesus was born to save us from our sins. He was born to take our place and feel the pain our mistakes brought on. He was born to do what we can't – obey God's law, and he was born to pay for the times that we don't. Jesus was born to save us, and so he was born to die for us.

See, we humans in every time and place have tried so many ways to deal with our failures – from denying them, to trying to blame someone else, to making excuses and trying to rationalize everything – but our efforts don't work. Even trying our best to be good can't fix our problem of sin, can't make our sins go away, can't clear us before God.

So that's why Christmas happened. This baby was born to rescue us from what our sins had coming, to deliver us from the guilt and shame and every evil that our mistakes bring into our lives. Jesus was born to save us from hell, and praise God he's met that potential and so much more for us now. By his perfect life as our substitute, Jesus kept God's Law flawlessly for us and gave us the credit for it, so now when God looks at us he sees those perfect, holy, loving companions that he always meant us to be. And by his death on the cross, Jesus took away your sins, defeated death and the devil, slammed shut the doors to hell, threw open the doors to heaven, and he promises you now that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Yes, this Christ-child Jesus came to be Immanuel, *God with us*, so that one day we can be with God in heavenly paradise forever.

That's quite a picture, isn't it. And yet it's one that our God wants us to behold this Christmas with the full confidence of faith. So let's listen to our children as they tell us more about God's illustrations of Immanuel, our Savior Jesus.