

Title: The Right Way

Text: Galatians 4.4-5

Theme: The virgin birth of Christ

Series: Advent 2005 #3

Prop Stmnt. The birth of Christ was done exactly the right way, since everything about Christ was absolutely perfect.

Read Text:

It is no secret that the wind has been taken out of our sails a little bit this week. It may seem that the holidays make tragedy even more difficult. And I grant you that we find some happiness in having our lives match the Christmas card pictures. But, the truth is, our real joy and true hope is anchored to the entire Christmas event and not to the romantic or idyllic notions of it. When you really think about it, the original Christmas event was a circumstantial disaster full of disappointment and even tragedy.

A young lady, engaged to be married is pregnant. Her reputation is now fair game to all the gossips in town. Her husband to be is caught in the middle of this completely unanticipated situation. The country is controlled by a foreign government that moves them about without much regard. This results in a decree that a census be taken forcing this young couple to hit the road at a time when no girl in her condition ought to be traveling. Her dreams for her wedding have obviously been seriously disrupted, her dreams for her family have all been rearranged, and now she cannot even plan or arrange for the circumstances for giving birth. In spite of Joseph's best efforts, he is unable to secure a place for them in Bethlehem. They were told there was no room in the inns, and while that is probably true, it is possible that it is also an indication of how poor and vulnerable this couple really was. They certainly had more questions than answers about how the news given to them by angels was working out in their circumstances.

The story continues, the announcement to the shepherds, and their subsequent visit gave Mary and Joseph much to ponder, because it is now clear, at least for the moment, that God had not abandoned them, even though their situation was not of their choosing. They obviously found a bit of a home in Bethlehem for a while, which is where an impressive entourage of Wise Men found them roughly 18 months later. But all of that quickly changed when it was discovered that Herod, the king, was issuing a decree that all boys in that town age 2 and under be killed. Do you think Joseph and Mary would ever be welcome back into that place? They were the ones who had brought unwanted attention upon that little town. Would they not bear the circumstantial blame for the deaths of these little ones? What kind of promised child is this that brings upon a parent the greatest weight they can think of to bear? This is no, o little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie, any longer. The birthplace of Christ has become the birthplace of sorrow and the birthplace of a tragedy that for many found no comfort or hope. It is my observation that many people who celebrate Christmas, celebrate a mirage, a fantasy, and do not connect the dots. The mirage of having yourself a merry, little Christmas can inoculate you to the real event and obviously to the real truth.

The real truth is this. We are sinful, needy, vulnerable, hurting and sometimes, very shallow and empty people who happen to live in the most (or one of the most) prosperous and affluent countries in the world. With our prosperity, and freedoms and insurance and things, we have been buffered by distractions that have distanced us from reality. The reality is that we are sinful, needy, vulnerable, hurting and sometimes shallow and empty people looking for the truth that we were designed to live by, looking for the relationship that we were created to live with, and looking for the identity that we were made to discover, yet too often settling for an inferior substitute that never lives up to its billing. God sent his son to us, but most of us do not realize how desperately needy we are for Him. Oh, sure we are not perfect, but we are not nearly as bad as some. Christianity is for weak people.

Colin Smith is a pastor who lives in Chicagoland. He has written a wonderful 4-volume series entitled, “Unlocking the Bible” that we carry in our bookstore. In it, he uses an analogy that has been used by a couple of other guys to illustrate this and I think it really helps us grasp the concept of this truth.

“Imagine that you are living on a large and beautiful island and that your home is located near a magnificent beach that stretches for miles. Life is good on the island, and you are happy to be there.

From time to time, you have been able to explore the island, and you have been fascinated to find people with many different cultures. All the islanders are surrounded by the ocean, and over the years, they’ve held many discussions about what may lie beyond the horizon. But nobody has ever left the island, and so nobody knows. The discussions never really get anywhere, and since most people have full and busy lives, they aren’t that interested.

The island is breathtakingly beautiful, and some islanders have spent many hours studying the wildlife, plants, weather systems, and rock formations. Islanders have also paid a great deal of attention to cultivating family life. Seminars have been held on how to have a healthy island marriage and how to bring up island kids. The land has all kinds of resources to help people develop in body, mind and spirit.

You and other islanders are all descended from castaways who were washed onto the island after a great disaster that happened many years ago – so long ago that many residents know little or nothing about it. In recent years, there has been a growing number of islanders who deny that there ever was a shipwreck. They dislike the idea of being descended from castaways and prefer to think of themselves as “natural islanders” who have always been there.

Besides, if the islanders were descended from castaways, it would mean that they were never intended to be on the island, but in some other place, and since there is no other place on the horizon, that seems rather self-defeating.

At the center of the island looms a high mountain with what looks like a crater at the top. One thing that has worried some people is the thought that it may be a volcano. At times the mountain seemed to throw up some ash, and there are stories of some people who got too close at the wrong time and were burned. But the horrendous scenarios of obliteration that have been predicted by some have never happened, and most people have come to the conclusion that they never will.

Early one morning, as you are out strolling on the beach, you see a reflection in the sand. As you look more closely, you notice that a green bottle has been washed up on the shore, and inside there is a message: "Help is coming."

Strange. You have never seen anything like this before. "*Help*"? *What kind of help could possibly be needed on the island?* you wonder.

A few weeks later, you see another bottle, with another message: "Help will arrive soon!" *This is really strange*, you think. Two bottles with the same message. Where could they have come from.

Your curiosity is aroused, and so you begin to walk the beach regularly, looking for bottles. Sure enough, you find another, and then another, all with a similar message. "Help is coming." "Help will be with you soon." "I am sending help."

The discoveries are strangely unnerving. After all, you are living on an idyllic island and are enjoying a very full and satisfying life. But the notes in the bottles keep suggesting that there is some kind of problem. You don't know what the problem is, and you can't imagine what it could be.

You decide to tell your neighbor Bill about the bottles. After all, he also walks the beach; perhaps he has found some too.

"Bill have you seen any bottles at the beach?"

"No. Why?"

"Well a few weeks ago I found one, with a note inside. I didn't think much about it, but then I found others. The strange thing is that there seems to be one consistent message in all of them. I'm beginning to think someone is out there beyond the horizon, and they are trying to communicate with us. Whoever he, she, or it is, they are telling us that we are in some sort of danger here, and they obviously have a plan to do something about it."

"Oh, that sounds rather fanciful to me," says Bill. "It is much more likely that the messages were written by some kids further round on the island. If they threw the bottles out to sea, it's quite possible that the tide washed them back in. You don't want to worry about a few messages in a bottle!"

But somehow you can't get the bottles and their messages out of your mind: "Help is coming."

The story of the islanders can help us grasp the big picture of the Bible story. Like an islander descended from castaways, you are not where you were meant to be. God created you to know Him, enjoy Him, and live in His presence. But there was a great disaster. Sin ruptured the relationship between man and God, and our first parents were driven out of Paradise. After they sinned, they found themselves in a fallen world which, for all its beauty, had a curse hanging over it.

But right from the beginning, God promised that help would come. Over hundreds of years God repeated that message through the Old Testament prophets. "Don't despair; I am sending help. Someone will come to rescue you from the danger that you do not yet fully understand."

Our problem is not about finding fulfillment on the island [although that certainly is a factor]; it is that the island will be destroyed. The island on which you were born is not where you ultimately belong, nor where you can remain forever. You were born for the mainland that you have never seen, but the only way you can get there is if someone comes from the mainland to rescue you.

That is why Jesus Christ came into the world. He has come from the mainland of heaven to the island of this world. He is the help that God promised at the beginning of the Bible story. He has come to save you from the destruction that will one day come on this world and bring you into an eternal life on the "mainland."¹

Before you were conceived, you did not exist. Before Christ was conceived, He did exist. He was God and eternally existed as God. This is seen in our text. As the 2nd person in the Trinity, he was sent by God to us. "But when the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under law...." The phrase, "God sent his son" speaks of the preexistence of Christ, which is another reminder of His deity. He was fully God who came to this earth. The next phrase, "born of a woman" is a statement about His humanity. He was fully God who came to this earth and added humanity to His deity. As Robert Reymond wrote, "Without ceasing to be all that he was and is, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the eternal Son of God took into union with himself in the one divine Person that which he had not possessed before – even a full complex of human attributes – and became fully and truly man for us men and for our salvation." God did not become in any way less than God. God added to Himself a human nature and took upon Himself the form of a human. He was born of a woman. That enabled Him to identify with us. That enabled Him to become credited with our sins (the sins of the human race). The sacrificial system of the OT could not pay the debt of sin, it could only postpone the payment. The OT sacrifices in a sense made interest payments. OT believers were declared righteous by their faith in what God had revealed (the Law) and they demonstrated their faith by their obedience. But the sacrifice of animals could not pay off the principle. (VISA illus.) Hebrews 10.1 – "The law is only a shadow of the

¹ Colin S. Smith, *Unlocking the Bible Story* vol. 3 pp.101-103, Moody Press, 2002.

good things that are coming – not the realities themselves.” These sacrifices had to be repeated, because they never fully satisfied the debt. Only a perfect, infinite human sacrifice could do that. Hebrews 10.4 “... it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” Jesus was born of a woman and that enabled Him to live in our place, which then enabled Him to die in our place. But, God, being born of a woman and experiencing human life to its fullest reveals some other aspects. The text in Galatians 4 goes on to say that Christ was born under law.

What law is that talking about? Romans chapter 2 speaks of the law of God that has been written on the conscience of every person. We are born with a moral code, which means that we have an innate sense of right and wrong. C.S. Lewis does a marvelous job of developing this idea in his little book, “Mere Christianity.” But, our sinful natures have distorted that innate moral code. As a human race, we know that there is a right and wrong, but we do not always agree upon what it is. The Bible speaks of another Law. It is the OT law. In fact, when the Bible speaks about the law, it is usually referring to the OT law. That is the law that Paul is speaking about here in Galatians 4. The OT law was God’s revelation to the nation of Israel for their faith and obedience. This Law set them apart from all other nations because they alone had been given this information about how to live in a manner that pleases God. Three major problems arose from this. 1) No one could live up to the standards of the Law. 2) The Law that was designed to make them aware of their need (since no one could measure up) became an occasion for pride. “We have the Law and you don’t!” The very thing that revealed how bad they were was distorted into being a point of pride. 3) The Law was great to reveal the need, but the Law could not save a person. But, in order for a person to understand that they need to be rescued, they have to be aware of the danger they are in.

It is as if you and your family were the only ones on the island to find the bottles and you proclaimed that you were better than all the rest because you alone possessed the bottles that spoke of your impending disaster. In fact, when the help did come, you were so arrogant over the fact that you had the bottles you did not bother to pay any attention to the messages themselves.

But the Law was given in order to reveal how deep our need really is. The Law was God’s message in a bottle that said life as you know it is going to come to an end. You need a Savior. A Savior is coming. But here is what is so amazing.

Christ was born under the Law. He was born under the regulations and the requirements of the OT and He happily obeyed them. The OT law and its dietary restrictions, its lifestyle and He delighted in them. The Law was not a weight that hung heavy around his neck. He lived a life that was in perfect obedience and conformity to the expectations, the heart, the intent and the standards of the Law. He offered sacrifices, not because He had sinned, but in fulfilling the requirements of the Law. He learned obedience in doing such things. He learned obedience, not in the context of disobedience, but in the context of experience. As God he was always complete but as a human he grew in wisdom and learning and in favor with God and with others. As God, he never lacked for anything, but as a human he needed sleep, food and rest. As God, He knew everything, but in His

human experience, in His human nature He was not always conscious of what His divine nature knew. Therefore, He was able to learn. There came a point in his learning when He became aware of why He loved to obey the Law of God. There came a point in his experience when He saw the sacrifices offered on the altar and realized that those were all pointing to the future when fully and finally a perfect sacrifice would be made to put an end to all sacrifices. There came a point in his experience when He realized that He was that sacrifice. There came a point when He realized that everyone else carried about on themselves a curse from the law because they could not fulfill the law. He realized that he would take their curse for them because He was not under the curse of the law because of His own failures, but He would go to the tree of execution as the One cursed in the place of others.

That first Christmas was a disaster that became our delight. His entrance into life was like His entire life. He was misunderstood, threatened and not given what He deserved. Those who were near Him were often abused and subject to scorn. The greatest injustice of man and the greatest demonstration of the justice of God was seen at the cross. The greatest demonstration of the hatred of man and the greatest demonstration of the love of God was seen at the cross. The greatest demonstration of the stupidity of man and the greatest demonstration of the wisdom of God was seen at the cross, for that which was done to destroy God's plan actually carried it out. Because, at the exact moment, God sent His Son to this world to rescue us by being born into the human race, by living in full obedience to the law that was established by God and by dying in your place. Your hope in this life is a hope that does not rest in this life. Your hope is only a true legitimate hope when it rests upon the One who came from the mainland to rescue us from this island before the entire thing blows itself up.

Christmas is not the time to simply decorate the island, it is to celebrate the fact that God came to us, to take us away! That frees us! That frees us to say the obvious. We are sinful people – but Jesus is our Savior. We are needy people, but Jesus fills our every need. We are empty, shallow people, but Jesus gives us an identity, meaning, purpose, depth and fulfillment. Our happiness is not tied to this island. We are now citizens of the mainland. We are people who naturally need to get a life, and Jesus gives us one that is forever!