

Christmas Eve C, 2012

Text: Luke 2:1-20

Title: What's Christmas All About

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My favorite Christmas TV special has to be Charlie Brown's. You know how it goes. Charlie Brown is directing a Christmas play, and he gets so fed up with all the commercialization and the distractions of the season until he finally blurts out in exasperation, "What's Christmas all about?"

We face this same question year after year. Whether it's teaching a young child, talking with older kids and grandkids, or even trying to keep our friends and family members focused this time of year, the question always comes down to "What is Christmas all about?"

All you'll get lots of different answers.

For many kids, Christmas is about cookies and presents and time off from school.

Adults don't fare much better. Many will say that Christmas is all about family or a spirit of magic and wonder. It's about giving and generosity and kindness, a time to reflect on the past and keep traditions alive.

You are here tonight because you know that Christmas is more than all that. Christmas is not about a feeling or a spirit. Christmas is much more real and down to earth than those things. At its heart, Christmas is about a person, Jesus. Without Jesus there would be no Santa, Rudolf or Frosty, no angels and shepherds and wisemen, no candles and songs and pretty decorations.

Jesus is the heart and center of Christmas, and he is the heart and center of what it means to be a Christian. When you strip it down, Christianity is not about an attitude or a feeling or emotions, it's not about rites and rituals and traditions, it's not about living a good life or having all the answers about God. It's about Jesus. Without Jesus there would be no Christians, no church, nothing.

And what do we know about Jesus? What we know about Jesus comes to us from God Himself. We don't try to figure Jesus out. The people of His day usually got it wrong, and when they got it right, it was only because they had a little help.

At Christmas time, God sends the angels to tell us about Jesus. We listen to them as the tell the shepherds, and us, everything we need to know.

When the angel appears to the shepherds, he tells them three things about this newborn baby. Three things that tell us who Jesus is and what He's come to do.

First, the angels tells us that Jesus is a Savior. He has come to save you, to rescue you. What do you need rescuing from? We all need to be rescued from sin and all the evil that it brings into our lives.

Sin is not just a matter of a few mistakes here and there, a few bad choices every now and then. Sin is the total corruption, the total depravity of the human state, the fact that you were born an enemy of God with your heart set on evil. All of us are born in sin, and it corrupts the way we think, our attitudes toward God, the way we treat one another. We don't love God the way that we should, and we don't love one another the way that we should. We are curved in and focused on ourselves.

Because of this we deserve nothing but God's punishment. We are guilty, beyond a shadow of doubt. There's no way to argue or bargain your way out. His judgment is clear. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And the punishment for sin is death. Eternal death.

And there's nothing that you can do to get out this situation. Sin is like a prison. And you are on death row.

Exactly one week ago tonight, Joseph Banks and Kenneth Conley escaped from jail. They had been arrested for bank robbery. During the night they stuffed their beds with clothes to look like they were sleeping, they broke out a window, they squeezed through the opening, and then used a homemade rope to climb 17 stories down to the ground.

People do escape from prison. But not the prison of sin. There is no way out, no way to free yourself. You need someone to come and rescue you, you need someone to break you out. You need a Savior. And that savior is Jesus.

Jesus came to rescue you from the prison of sin and from the judgment of eternal death. He took your place in the prison cell, even though He was totally innocent. Jesus even willingly took your seat in the electric chair, he was execute for you, he took your punishment for you, so that you could walk away free.

That's why Jesus came. He came to die. That's part of Christmas, too, the fact that Jesus came to give His life for you. That's what makes Him a Savior.

So the angel says, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

After calling Jesus a Savior, the angel names Him as "Christ."

Now Christ is not a name. Some people even treat it like it's Jesus' last name. But it's a title. The Hebrew version is "Messiah," and it means "the anointed one."

Now we don't do much anointing these days, but it's all over the place in the Old Testament. Priests were anointed at their ordinations. Kings were anointed at their coronations. Prophets

were even anointed from time to time. It was a way to show that God had chosen someone for a particular purpose.

Throughout the Old Testament there are promises that God would send someone special to be the great High Priest and offer the last, final sacrifice, to be a King even greater than David, and rule with justice forever, to be a prophet even greater than Moses who would speak for God Himself.

All the people, the stories, the events of the Old Testament, everything that came before Jesus pointed forward to Him, got the people ready for Him. Everything from creation to the flood to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and the Exodus, Joshua and the conquest, the judges, the kings, the prophets, Jonah, Daniel, Ezekiel and the rest, all of these give us a picture of who the Messiah, the Christ, the coming anointed one would be.

Jesus didn't just appear out of nowhere. If you want to try to figure Jesus out, start with the Old Testament, see how God interacted with His people, and hear the promises that He made. This Lent and up through Easter we'll be looking at seven of these stories: creation, the flood, Abraham and Isaac, the Exodus, Ezekiel and the dry bones, Job, and the three young men in the fiery furnace, and seeing in each of these stories a picture of Jesus, and what He came to do.

And it's not just about the past, everything that Jesus did a long time ago. Jesus continues to fulfill God's promises here and now, today. Jesus is your Christ, as He does what He promises to do, as He forgives your sins, as He hears your prayers, as He blesses you with peace with God, as He makes you His people.

Jesus will continue to keep those promises until He comes again, appearing in glory, restoring creation, making all things new, putting an end to your enemies of sin, death, and the devil. Christmas is a reminder that God kept His promises in the past, and He will continue to do so now and until He comes again.

Finally, the angel calls Jesus, "the Lord." This doesn't just mean that Jesus is mighty and powerful, that He's a strong ruler. When the angel calls Jesus, the Lord, he is saying that Jesus is God Himself.

When it came time to rescue a world imprisoned by sin, when it came time to keep His promises to save His people, God Himself came to do the job. He didn't send an angel to do it for Him, He didn't choose a really good person to be His representative, God Himself came in the flesh.

That's how much God loves you. He comes down from heaven to earth, the only begotten Son of God, ere the worlds began to be, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, this is who lies in the manger.

You know the difference between sending a card or talking on the phone and seeing someone in person. God came to be with you in the flesh, Immanuel, God with us. And He's with us still. When the manger and the stable get put away, when the cards and the trees and the decorations come down, God is still here with you in the Lord's Supper. Here is Jesus Christ, the same body

that was wrapped in swaddling cloths and placed on the manger is here for you. Here is Jesus Christ, your Lord and Savior.

This is what Christmas is all about. Not just singing about Jesus or talking about Jesus but actually physically receiving Jesus' body and blood, to rescue you from your sin, to bring you together as God's people, and to make you holy, just like God Himself.

And once you have Jesus, then everything else falls into place- the carols and the candles and all the traditions point to Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior here with us now. The time with friends and family, the feasts and celebrations are a thankful response to everything that Jesus does for us.

Go, enjoy your Christmas, eat your cookies, open your presents, see the whole family, because all these are gifts from God and you can enjoy them because you are saved by Jesus Christ, and God is with you wherever you go.