Come and See a Miraculous Birth

# Scripture: John 1:1-12

# Key Thought: Glimpsing the miracle of who Jesus is helps us to respond in worship.

# Intro idea for Series – Come and See

## The Christians liturgical year begins today (Dec. 1, 2013) – why?

This is a good question for us to ponder. Short answer is this. The church’s year is designed to be a reflection of the life of Christ and the following of Christ. Since his story begins with his birth, it is natural to start the church year there. However, if you know a little about the church year, you know that the Christmas season actually begins at Christmas and goes through January 6. So why does the church year start four Sundays before Christmas? While I’m not an expert on the history of the church year, I understand that the answer focuses on preparing. Just as the time before Easter, which we call Lent, was a time of prayer and fasting and preparation for the celebration of Christ’s resurrection, so the time before Christmas, which is known as Advent, was similarly a related time of prayer and fasting in preparation for the celebration of Christ’s birth. In a strict observance of the Advent Christmas tradition, the liturgist saves most of the Christmas carols for the two weeks after Christmas, while the four weeks before Christmas are devoted to the themes such as prophecy, repentance, prayer, waiting, and preparation. These certainly are great and important biblical themes. However, the way our culture celebrates Christmas does not allow us to wait four weeks to pick up the theme of Christ’s birth. So as I design Advent celebrations, I usually focus on Advent and Christmas together beginning at four Sundays before Christmas and ending either one or two Sundays after Christmas, depending upon the year.

## Intro idea for sermon –

This year’s sermon series focuses on the heart of the season, our Lord and Savior himself. Christmas is a visual season. We decorate for this season more than any other holiday of the year. We love the lights, the red and green and white colors. It is the one time of year when we almost universally welcome the sparkle of snow. We wrap the presents so that they are beautiful to look at as well as pleasant to receive.

Christmas is also a season of anticipation. The Advent season, as I just explained, has been set up across the centuries as a spiritual time of preparation and expectation, looking forward to the celebration of Christmas holiday. It is a time set aside for spiritual inventory, confession and renewal. There is about it a great sense of hope as we anticipate the coming of the one who announces peace and brings light.

This year’s Advent/Christmas sermon series title captures little bit of both of these two themes of the Christmas holiday. This year series is called, “Come and See.” Just as little children are anxious to see those wrapped gifts around the tree, so I ask us to come and take a look once again at the truths of Christmas in order that we be under better understand the gifts that are God is giving to us through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today I begin in the Gospel of John. While it does not have a birth narrative, in the same sense as Matthew and Luke do, its first chapter helps us immensely to understand the birth of Jesus. What can we learn from John chapter 1 about the miraculous birth that happened on the very first Christmas? What is John telling us about who Jesus was even from the manger?

# An amazing condescension

The first thing John wants us to know is that, in Jesus’ case, the human side of the story is not really the beginning. For us, our lives have a beginning and our parents often enjoy telling us the story of when we were born and the circumstances surrounding our birth.

# But John wants us to know that Jesus existed before his Bethlehem birth.

John 1:1 – “The Word was with God and the Word was God.”

The prophets agree. Dan 7:13, 14 – Vision of the Son of Man

Later in his life, Jesus would teach the same thing. John 8:58 “Before Abraham was born, I AM.”

Apostle Paul taught it too. Col. 1:17-“He is before all things.”

# So Christmas is the greatest voluntary humiliation ever!

[He] emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Phil 2:7-8 RSV

So the first amazing fact really deepens the mystery. Somehow, this babe in the manger is connected continuously with the preexistent divine person called the Word! This one deliberately chose to come here to this earth and be born. That is, if you will, the God side of his family.

# So Jesus is a miraculous combination of God and humanity.

The Scripture does not shy away from this idea.

**The Scripture record says here is John 1:13 that he is “born of God.”**

# Matt 1:18-23 - information given to Joseph by God

v. 18 Mary is with child through the Holy Spirit.

v. 20 What is conceived is from the Holy Spirit

v. 23 Therefore they will call him Immanuel which means God with us.

# The human side of the story – Luke 1, 2 and Matthew 2

On the other hand, the human side of the story is summarized so well in the tender narrative of Matthew and Luke as they tell us about Joseph and Mary. We learn how Mary finds out that she has been chosen. When she says yes, she learns from the Angel messenger that she will soon be pregnant with a divine/human child. This child will not be some alien thing, stealing the way into the womb of a human, a la some science fiction movie. No, this Christmas babe will also be a very human child, the child of Mary.

So the Christmas Babe, from the beginning will have two natures, two sides to his life—the divine and the human. What a mystery! What a miracle! What a potentiality!

Ill. John Calvin in his Institutes illustrated it with the close relationship between body and soul in the human person. They are not the same, yet one is not the other. They are both identified with the person we are yet each has its own realm of relationship.

When it is said that the Word was made flesh, we must not understand it as if he were either changed into flesh, or confusedly intermingled with flesh, but that he made choice of the Virgin's womb as a temple in which he might dwell. He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. For we maintain, that the divinity was so conjoined and united with the humanity, that the entire properties of each nature remain entire, and yet the two natures constitute only one Christ. If, in human affairs, any thing analogous to this great mystery can be found, the most apposite similitudes seems to be that of man, who obviously consists of two substances, neither of which however is so intermingled with the other as that both do not retain their own properties. For neither is soul body, nor is body soul. Wherefore that is said separately of the soul which cannot in any way apply to the body; and that, on the other hand, of the body which is altogether inapplicable to the soul; and that, again, of the whole man, which cannot be affirmed without absurdity either of the body or of the soul separately. Lastly, the properties of the soul are transferred to the body, and the properties of the body to the soul, and yet these form only one man, not more than one. Such modes of expression intimate both that there is in man one person formed of two compounds, and that these two different natures constitute one person. Thus the Scriptures speak of Christ. They sometimes attribute to him qualities which should be referred specially to his humanity and sometimes qualities applicable peculiarly to his divinity, and sometimes qualities which embrace both natures, and do not apply specially to either. This combination of a twofold nature in Christ they express so carefully, that they sometimes communicate them with each other, a figure of speech which the ancients termed "idiomaton koinonia", (a communication of properties.) from website <http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/calvin/bk2ch14.html#one.htm> indicating it is from chapter 14.

The Gospel of John is the best place in Scripture to try to understand this miracle as much as humans can understand it. The table below shows a little bit of the contrast that is easily drawn from John’s Gospel.

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| --- | --- |
| The human and divine natures of Jesus in John | |
| **Became flesh** | **Word was God** |
| **Form of a servant** | **Conceived of the Holy Spirit** |
| **Subject to death** | **Having the power of life** |
| **Born after John** | **Was before John** |
| **Lived among those who have not seen God** | **Jesus has made God known** |

# Early creeds recognized what the Scriptures taught.

# The Nicene Creed – Council of Nicaea – A.D. 325

* We believe … in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father . . . God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one essence with the Father. … For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.

# The Council of Chalcedon A.D. 451

* Following, therefore, the holy fathers, we confess one and the same Son, who is our Lord Jesus Christ, and we all agree in teaching that this very same Son is complete in his deity and complete-the very same-in his humanity. . .. two natures since the difference of the natures is not destroyed because of the union, but on the contrary, the character of each nature is preserved and comes together in one person…

From Bible.org

The Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) failing to penetrate the mystery of the divine and human natures of Christ, offered four precautions that would protect the Christian from error when contemplating this mystery.

* Attribute true and proper divinity to Christ.
* Attribute true and proper humanity to Christ
* Do not so mingle the human and divine that you end up with a being neither human nor divine.
* Do not dissect Christ so that there are two persons in one being.

E. Goodrick, Is My Bible the Inspired Word of God, Multnomah, 1988

# Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England #2 Version of 1801

* “The Son which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God and of one substance with the Father, took Man’s nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that the two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and the Manhood, were joined together in one Person never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man; who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice not only for the original guilt, but also for the actual sins of men.”

# United Methodist Discipline 2012

* The Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man’s nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin; so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided; whereof is one Christ, very God and very man… (Article II – Of the Word, or Son of God, Who Was Made Very Man p. 64)

This Combination Is Essential for Our Salvation

* + Irenaeus of Lyon–early bishop - 175-195 A.D.
  + “It is necessary that ‘the mediator between God and human beings’ [1 Tim. 2:5], through his sharing in the life of both, bring the two together in friendship and harmony and bring it about both that humanity is made over to God and that God is made known to human beings.”
  + “[The Scriptures] point us to the two natures of our Lord which united constitute him the ladder from earth to heaven.” A. H. Strong

# A marvelous source of blessing

# A Miraculous Source of Blessing – Step 1

We have seen his glory–v. 14

# The true light that gives light- v. 9

# full of grace and truth- v. 14

# If you’ve seen me – you have seen the Father -John 14:9

# Jesus’ words in John 1:51 – you will see heaven open

# A Miraculous Source of Blessing Step 2

We receive a new relationship with God. –v. 12

# To all who believe he gives the right to become children of God. - John 1:12

# “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Peter 1:23 NIV).

# “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1 NIV).

A Miraculous Source of Blessing – Step 3

# From the fullness of his grace – one blessing after another. v. 16

# “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Rom 8:32-33 NIV

# “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, Eph 1:22 NIV

# Conclusion: Our Response

# Know – Become more aware of the miracle of baby Jesus.

# His pre-existence

# His self-emptying

# His two complete natures

# Feel – Awed that God did send his Son to become human.

# Do – Open our Minds and Hearts to Adore Jesus this Christmas.

Closing Prayer

Our Father, forgive us for our shallow, glib celebrating which does not adequately respect the mystery and miracle of the incarnation of Jesus, Our Savior. We pray that you would enlarge our understanding of the mystery of the first Christmas. Please deepen our sense of awe as we worship the Christ of Christmas this year. May our lips adore him freely and our hearts open wide to receive your proffered grace, in his holy majestic name, we pray, AMEN.