

Carol Service

Hobart, December 22nd, 2013

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INTRODUCTION:

I. CAN YOU IMAGINE CREATING A WORLD MADE OF ICE CREAM STICKS, PAPER MACHE AND OTHER BITS AND PIECES FROM AROUND YOUR HOUSE

A. THEN GIVING UP YOUR HUMANITY TO STEP DOWN INSIDE THAT LITTLE CREATION AND BECOME PART OF IT?

1. In a way, that is what God has done for us
2. Except the world he created is real, and it is in a lot of trouble because it has turned away from its creator and gone rogue, attempting to live independently of him all together, even denying his existence

II. TODAY WE ARE HERE TO

A. READ ABOUT, SING ABOUT, AND GIVE THANKS

1. for the birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ
2. The main readings are going from the early chapters of the gospel of Luke
 - a) Near the end we will take time to give an offering and have a time of prayer and thanks

B. OPENING PRAYER: PHIL S.

BODY:

A. LET'S GO BACK IN HISTORY TO SET THE SCENE FOR THE BIRTH OF GOD AS A HUMAN BEING, ENTERING INTO HIS OWN CREATION

1. We could go back to Genesis, and talk about mankind's abandonment of God, going our separate way, to try to be our own supreme beings
 - a) And the subsequent pain and suffering that has resulted ever since

2. But we are going to start at the time of Israel's doing the same thing

a) Failing to trust in God, and be his faithful people

B. WE SEE FIRST THE PROBLEM THAT CREATED, AND THEN THE SOLUTION GOD PROMISED

ISAIAH 8:20-22 The Problem

²⁰ Look to God's instructions and teachings! People who contradict his word are completely in the dark. ²¹ They will go from one place to another, weary and hungry. And because they are hungry, they will rage and curse their king and their God. They will look up to heaven ²² and down at the earth, but wherever they look, there will be trouble and anguish and dark despair. They will be thrown out into the darkness.

1. Israel saw God as distant and separate from them.

a) They saw him as a god to be negotiated with and to obey, not as their loving Father and source of all good things.

b) They failed to understand and accept that God was their creator, the one who loved them and sustained them and who created them to thrive and find joy and prosperity through a love relationship with him

2. So they ended up doing their own thing, living apart from God in darkness and despair.

ISAIAH 9:1-7 The Solution

9 ¹ Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory.

² The people who walk in darkness will see a great light.

For those who live in a land of deep darkness, [Greek version reads *a land where death casts its shadow*]* a light will shine.

³ You will enlarge the nation of Israel, and its people will rejoice.

They will rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest and like warriors dividing the plunder.

* Verse 9:1 is numbered 8:23 in Hebrew text.

* Greek version reads *a land where death casts its shadow*. Compare Matt 4:16.

⁴ For you will break the yoke of their slavery
and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders.

You will break the oppressor's rod,
just as you did when you destroyed the army of Midian.

⁵ The boots of the warrior
and the uniforms bloodstained by war will all be burned.
They will be fuel for the fire.

⁶ For a child is born to us,
a son is given to us.
The government will rest on his shoulders.
And he will be called:
Wonderful Counselor,* Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ His government and its peace will never end.
He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David
for all eternity.
The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies
will make this happen!

C. CAROL: UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN: (MICHAEL CARD)

D. THOMAS TORRANCE DESCRIBES THIS BACKGROUND TO JESUS' BIRTH

...God took this stubborn people, as a potter might take the worst and lumpiest and most resistant and intractable clay, in order to put it upon the wheel for moulding and shaping into an earthen vessel designed to contain heavenly treasure. God chose Israel, then, with all its recalcitrance and intractability, with all its resentment against his love, and subjected them to ordeal by history and judgement. He used their very stubbornness and the judgement they brought upon themselves in order to train them....

* Or *Wonderful, Counselor*.

And then at the last in the fullness of time, when God had prepared in the heart and soul and religion of Israel a womb for the birth of Jesus, a cradle for the child of Bethlehem, the saviour of the world was born, the very Son of God—born of God right into the midst of Israel with all its suffering contradiction of God, into the midst of the Old Testament faith and that reached out in it to fulfilment in this very hour of incarnation.

And so when the hour came in the fullness of time, there were actually some, who, when they saw him, recognised him as the Son of God come in the flesh, the redeemer of Israel, and the light to lighten the Gentiles—Zechariah, Anna, Simeon, and John the Baptist, and who more than the blessed virgin Mary, and then, one after another, the twelve disciples, and many others who acknowledged that this was indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God, the saviour of the world.¹

Apart from this Old Testament prehistory and all the biblical revelation through Israel, we would not have the tools to grasp the knowledge of God; apart from the long history of the Jews we would not be able to recognise Jesus as the Son of God... Apart from the covenant forged in sheer grace with undeserving and rebellious Israel and the unswerving faithfulness of the divine love, we would not be able to understand the mystery of our restoration to union with God in Jesus Christ. Apart from the context of Israel we could not even begin to understand the bewildering miracle of Jesus.²

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. ²⁸ Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

²⁹ Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. ³⁰ "Don't be frightened, Mary," the angel told her, "for God has decided to bless you! ³¹ You will become pregnant and have a son, and you are to name him Jesus. ³² He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give him the

¹ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Incarnation*, p.42-43

² Torrance, p. 44

* **Luke 1:28** Some manuscripts add *Blessed are you among women*.

throne of his ancestor David. ³³ And he will reign over Israel* forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

³⁴ Mary asked the angel, "But how can I have a baby? I am a virgin."

³⁵ The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby born to you will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she's already in her sixth month. ³⁷ For nothing is impossible with God."

1. Jesus was born of Mary, a human mother, but he was born uniquely in that he was conceived not by a human father but by God

a) He was a unique person, being the Son of God become human, God himself entering into our humanity, sharing in our life and created flesh.

b) The work of the Holy Spirit in Mary shows how God work in all of us when we yield to him, bringing Jesus into our lives to give us new birth and transformation into a new life in him

³⁸ Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant, and I am willing to accept whatever he wants. May everything you have said come true." And then the angel left.³

2. Mary's humble accepting attitude is what God wants to build in us through the Spirit

E. TORRANCE DESCRIBES MARY'S ATTITUDE;

It is an act of glad and thankful and humble submission and surrender to the will of God. And within her there takes place the incomprehensible act of God, the birth of the Son of God in human form.

a) Unlike her forbears, she trusted God fully, and was blessed as a result, and became a source of blessing to all mankind

b) In a sense she is the second Eve, becoming God's servant and instrument in restoring that which was lost at the beginning.

2. Torrance continues on to describe how we are to have Mary's attitude;

* *Luke 1:33* Greek over the house of Jacob.

³*Holy Bible : New Living Translation.* 1997, c1996 (electronic ed.) (Lk 1:25). Wheaton: Tyndale House.

As in the annunciation of the word to Mary, Christ the Word himself became flesh, so in the enunciation of the gospel, we surrender in like manner to Christ the Word now made flesh, and there takes place in us the birth of Jesus, or rather, we are in a remarkable way given to share through grace in his birth and to share in the new creation in him.

That is the Christian message—the Christmas message.

It is not of our self-will or free-will that we are saved and born anew from above. 'But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.' [John 1:12].

Just as he was born from above of the Holy Spirit, so we are born above of the Holy Spirit through sharing in his birth.⁴

In faith we are opened up from above and given to receive what we are ourselves are incapable of receiving in and by ourselves.⁵

The virgin birth is thus the way which the true humanity of the Son of God took once for all in our sinful world in coming for our salvation, and is therefore also a sign of the manner of his continuous coming to us with in the same world.

In Christ who is true man and true God we have the mediator and reconciler in whom God and man are not simply brought near each other but in whom God and man become one for all eternity.

It is in him the Lord Jesus, born of the virgin Mary and risen from the dead, that we are born again through the Holy Spirit, given to share as members of his body, and we frail human beings are thus enfolded with him in the life of God.⁶

F. THIS IS WHAT JESUS' BIRTH IS ALL ABOUT.

- 1. This is what we are here to celebrate, to read, sing and praise God for.**
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⁴ Torrance, p.101

⁵ Torrance, p.102

⁶ Torrance, p.105

III. LUKE 2:1-24

2 ¹At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. ²(This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³All returned to their own towns to register for this census. ⁴And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. ⁵He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was obviously pregnant by this time.

For the census **Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem**, Joseph's ancestral home. Joseph was a descendant **of David** (cf. 1:27), who was born in Bethlehem. Some have argued that it seems strange that people were not registered in the places where they currently lived.⁷

1. **They had been told that the baby Mary was carrying was the Messiah**
 - a) and they would have known also, that the Messiah was prophesied to be born in Bethlehem

Micah 5:2

²But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village in Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past. ³The people of Israel will be abandoned to their enemies until the time when the woman in labor gives birth to her son. Then at last his fellow countrymen will return from exile to their own land. ⁴And he will stand to lead his flock with the LORD's strength, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. Then his people will live there undisturbed, for he will be highly honored all around the world. ⁵And he will be the source of our peace.

B. THE WORD PEACE;

1. **"Shalom" in Hebrew, "Irene" in Greek, means setting things right, fixing what is wrong, redeeming and restoring things to their proper state.**
 - a) Jesus as God and man does that
 - b) He is God with us, and restores humanity to our rightful place and relationship with God

cf. *confer*, compare

⁷Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (208). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

c) He forgives our wrongs, and takes away all the evils and injustices, the suffering and pain humans have caused

C. O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

Luke 2:6-7

⁶And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. ⁷She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the village inn.

1. **This was the most amazing and significant event in history to that point**
2. **The Son of God became part of the creation, sharing our humanity, our life**
3. **He did what we couldn't do, he acted within our lives and existence free from all that is darkness and death, and sin— to bring us back into his eternal light and life of love**

D. SILENT NIGHT

Luke 2:8-20

The Shepherds and Angels

⁸ That night some shepherds were in the fields outside the village, guarding their flocks of sheep. ⁹ Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terribly frightened, ¹⁰ but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news of great joy for everyone! ¹¹ The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born tonight in Bethlehem, the city of David! ¹² And this is how you will recognize him: You will find a baby lying in a manger, wrapped snugly in strips of cloth!"

¹³ Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God:

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to all whom God favors.*"

¹⁵ When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Come on, let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this wonderful thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶ They ran to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. ¹⁷ Then the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. ¹⁸ All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, ¹⁹ but Mary quietly treasured these things in her heart and thought about them often. ²⁰ The shepherds went back to their fields and flocks, glorifying and praising God for what the angels had told them, and because they had seen the child, just as the angel had said.

* **Luke 2:14** Or *and peace on earth for all those pleasing God*. Some manuscripts read *and peace on earth, goodwill among people*.

E. EARTH BIRTH BY HAROLD MACDONALD LUKE 2: 1-20

In Bethlehem the time stands very still
stars in their courses gaze with wonder down
to see their Maker take a human crown
and all God's loving promises fulfil.

The shepherds in the field are night-time cold
they shudder in the marrow of the bone
except for animals they are alone
until the angels come, and sky turns gold

To Bethlehem the shepherds quickly come
simple folk at home in simple barn
rough their kindness, never meaning harm
they worship, warmed by joy, no longer numb.

The Word eternal leapt from heav'n that night
to join God's saving love to human plight.

F. WHILE SHEPHERDS WATCHED THEIR FLOCKS BY NIGHT

Luke 2:21-32

Jesus Is Presented in the Temple

²¹ Eight days later, when the baby was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel even before he was conceived.

²² Then it was time for the purification offering, as required by the law of Moses after the birth of a child; so his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. ²³ The law of the Lord says, "If a woman's first child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the Lord."* ²⁴ So they offered a sacrifice according to what was required in the law of the Lord—"either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."*

The Prophecy of Simeon

²⁵ Now there was a man named Simeon who lived in Jerusalem. He was a righteous man and very devout. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he eagerly expected the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. ²⁶ The Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, ²⁸ Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹ "Lord, now I can die in peace!

As you promised me,

³⁰ I have seen the Savior

³¹ you have given to all people.

³² He is a light to reveal God to the nations,

and he is the glory of your people Israel!"

G. WHAT CHILD IS THIS?

* *Luke 2:23* Exod 13:2.

* *Luke 2:24* Lev 12:8.

IV. SO WHY DID JESUS COME?

A. CHARLES WESLEY WROTE ABOUT WHY JESUS CAME IN HIS FAMOUS HYMN,

1. set to the music of Mendelssohn;

B. "HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING"

1. the 2nd verse:

Christ by highest heaven adored
Christ the everlasting Lord
Late in time behold him come
Offspring of a virgin's womb!
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see
Hail the incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man, with men to dwell
Jesus our Immanuel

C. JESUS WAS GOD WITH US, "IMMANUEL"

1. God come to be one with us
 - a) To bring us to be one with him, and one with one another
2. It is in that context that he brought peace and joy to all mankind, then, now, and forever

D. JESUS WAS GOD'S WAY OF GIVING HIMSELF TO US

1. Of sharing and communicating his love and life to us
2. Torrance;

We cannot but acknowledge that all our human life is involved in sin, and that our very existence is involved in original sin—but the birth of Jesus was a birth of the holy Son into that condition which far from acquiescing in its sin, resists it, sanctifying what sin had corrupted, and uniting it again to the purity of God.⁸

E. OFFERING

F. HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING

⁸ Torrance, p.101

TIME OF PRAYER AND THANKS

G. WE NOW WILL TAKE SOME TIME FOR PRAYER AND THANKSGIVING.

1. Feel free to come forward and pray.
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CONCLUSION:

A. JOSEPH TKACH SUMS UP THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS;

What is it that makes the Christmas season a time of such joy?

I think the joy of Christmas comes from knowing that God loves us so much that he made us one with Jesus. In Jesus, God opened up the life of the Trinity to humanity and drew us into that life through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus stood in for us and did for us what we couldn't do for ourselves.

He reconciled us and he secured our adoption as beloved children of the Father.

We didn't decide any of this. We didn't earn any of it. We didn't qualify for any of it. It was a God's gift, given to us solely out of his great kindness and mercy and love, because he is love. That's what Christmas is all about, and what could be more joyful than that?⁹

B. JOY TO THE WORLD

C. PRAYER

⁹ Dr. Joseph Tkach, Weekly Update to Pastors, December 15th, 2010,