

# Sermon Text for December 22, 2024

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

## *Isaiah 7:10-14 and Matthew 1:18-25*

### *“Jesus is born”*

For the next three times that we will be gathered together, today, Christmas Eve in just two days time, and next Sunday, we will be looking at the same sermon title which is Jesus is born. We will be in Matthew chapter 1 today, and then chapter 2 for Christmas Eve and next Sunday. When we in staff meeting on Tuesdays I read the Scripture that is coming up for the next Sunday and after I read chapter 1 of Matthew a voice came from staff that asked the question, wait, are we starting over, and it wasn't a voice of anticipation and joy. No, we are not starting over, but for this last Sunday of Advent and then for our Christmas season, we will be looking at why Christmas is Christmas, why we celebrate that Jesus is born and what his birth means for us.

What difference today and every day does the birth of the Savior make? We will find that answer in a question that is on the confirmation exam every year in the area of theology. We divide the confirmation curriculum into sections, it begins with Bible basic, and then our theological roots, and then the history of our people etc. After each section they take an exam. On the theology exam there is this question that for some reason many every year get wrong.

So let me see how you all do, it is true or false. We are able to earn our salvation through good works and faith. True or false? When we say that Jesus is born we are actually saying that Jesus came for the primary purpose of saving us from our sins. God has done that through the birth of Jesus. We have no part in that. We don't contribute to that either with our good works or with our faith. Our job is to embrace this life which has been redeemed and to live righteously. Let's read.

### **READ**

Our Isaiah Scripture is a very traditional Scripture that is read just about every Christmas time. Isaiah was the prophet to the king of Judah, which would have been the king of the people of God, the Jews, around the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, so about 800 years before Jesus. When we say something took place in the 1200s that was a very, very long time ago. It kinda doesn't even seem real to us. This is how long it was from when Jesus was born to when this conversation between King Ahaz, the king of the people of God, and God takes place.

Ahaz is known as not a great king and he is known to take matters into his own hands and not really follow God's leading in his life at all. Isaiah, who is like the pastor to Ahaz, is

frustrated and wants to show Ahaz how God is at his side and that all he needs to do is trust in God and look for God's guidance and God will deliver him from his enemies who are surrounding him. Because of the disobedience of Ahaz, because of the sin of Ahaz, God shows him a sign of his presence and that is the birth of a baby boy named Emmanuel, which means? God with us. Isn't that interesting, because Ahaz was stubborn and disobedient God had to act in a way to make sure that there was no doubt that he was present, through the birth of a son named Emmanuel, God with us.

Some of us may be sitting in these pews and thinking: I don't feel worthy to be here in church, I don't feel worthy to even consider myself a believer or a disciple of Jesus. I haven't done enough, I don't really believe as I probably should. I am surrounded by saints who have lived perfect lives. I'm just going to try to figure things out on my own and hopefully if I do enough good things and I believe in God that will be enough. All of that thinking is centered on you, on what you have done, on what you are doing, on what you believe on what you think. Christmas is a time when we turn our gaze away from us and toward the one who has claimed us in the birth of Jesus. Don't continue to live your life like Ahaz who was stubborn and refused to listen to the voice of God. What God says to Ahaz is I'm going to take matters into my own hands. If you're not going to do what I ask you to do, it will still get done.

Joseph in our Matthew Scripture, as we read about the birth of Jesus, does that which God has asked him to do. Let's turn there now. **VIDEO CLIP**

Let's be clear that when Jesus was born this baby belonged to the people. The one who came to save all the people from their sin no longer belonged to Mary, not even when Jesus was born, and never really did belong to Joseph even though we see that Joseph is the one who names him. But we are getting ahead of ourselves because of the lion king.

Matthew 1:18 begins with the words what? Greek is He Genesis. Matthew 1:1 begins with the words what? Greek is also Genesis. The beginning, the birth of Jesus is really the beginning as reflected not only in Matthew but also in the first book of the Bible, Genesis 1 begins how? In the beginning. When Jesus is born it begins something new, a new chapter, a new covenant between us and God, a new way in which God has a relationship with us. No longer do we know God through the law and rules and sacrifices. No longer is our relationship with God based upon our ability to follow the law, like it used to be. Our relationship with God is now based upon God's initiative and action.

Matthew gives us the perspective of Joseph in this birth narrative of Jesus. Luke gives us the perspective from Mary's point of view. We see in the story of the birth of Jesus that three

times Joseph is commanded to do something directly from an angel. Here in this Scripture an angel tells Joseph to take Mary and to marry her. This was no small feat. Mary had broken the law according to Deuteronomy 22:23-27. Let's read that so that we understand the gravity of this offense. But Joseph is a righteous man and he follows the words of Hosea 6:6 where we read that I desire mercy and not sacrifice. I desire compassion and not blind faith. His deciding to divorce Mary quietly is a demonstration that his love for God is stronger than his love for Mary.

Then the angel tells him to name the baby born Jesus. Jesus which literally means God Save. It can also mean God heals, it can also mean delivers. Yeshua was a common name, and one that had all of these meanings. But the angle made it clear that for this Jesus, it was mean God saves because he would save his people from their sin. Call him Jesus, for just as Psalm 130:7-8 tells us... When we read from the angel that this Jesus will save his people from their sin. Who do you think his people are? Who are the people of Jesus? We are. The church. Jesus is born means for us, church that we have one who came for the specific purpose of saving us from our sin. And what God sets out to do, gets done.

Again, this is God's work, not our work. The significance is not on the birth itself. But it is on God forgiving our sins. When we say Jesus is born we normally make a big deal of the birth, from pageants to hymns, to decorations, etc. Look at this place. But it all is for the purpose not of the birth of Jesus, but for the saving us from our sins so that we would not die without hope. The one who is born, Jesus, is both the Emmanuel from Isaiah and the Jesus from Matthew. God with us in His saving power. This is what Jesus is born means.

How different would our life be if we could stop trying so hard around this time of year to do everything right? To be the perfect mom, to be the perfect dad, to be the perfect spouse. You will never reach the goal that you are striving after if it is not Emmanuel, if God is not with us. That is where the focus on this time of year ought to be. I know, you have two more days before the countdown ends, but what if you went home today and lit an advent candle and just spent time giving thanks to God for sending Jesus to forgive our sins. How would that feel?

When Jesus is born in our lives we no longer have to feel guilty for our past. When Jesus is born in our lives then we desire to be in communion with him and it makes a difference in how we view the world and how we view our role in the world. It is not what we do, but it is what God has done for us, and that makes all the difference.

Jesus is born is a reminder that God is with us every step of the way, and we are never alone on this journey. Our good works and our faith do not serve the purpose of receiving a

prize, salvation. We simply desire to act according to the will of God knowing that it will lead to a life that is more full here on earth and an assurance of eternal life that is to come. Jesus is born, thanks be to God. Amen.