

Sermon 12-30-18
Pastor Ray Lorthioir
Trinity Lutheran Church
W. Hempstead, NY
First Sunday of Christmas

Politicians Babies and Microscopes

Politicians

True to form, the narrative of Jesus' birth has again been misused by various parties this year. In my opinion the most egregious misuse is the political meme that Jesus, Mary and Joseph were refugees or illegal immigrants in Bethlehem.

When we dispense with the political nonsense and read the biblical narrative, it emerges that Jesus, Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem because of the two things politicians love to do most – issue government edicts and tax.¹ Therefore, Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem quite legally. They were obeying a government edict.

Caesar Augustus had no inkling that his census and taxation plan would play into the hands of Almighty God. The day he created the plan was just another day for a politician. But a thousand years before the birth of Jesus, God promised to King David that Messiah would come from his family line.² And David's family home was Bethlehem. Six hundred years before Jesus, God told the prophets that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.³ Therefore, God used Caesar to fulfill what He had foretold. Mighty Caesar got used!

Yes, there was no room at the inn. But that was not because Bethlehem was inhospitable to immigrants. Indeed, as descendants of King David, both Joseph and Mary were no immigrants. If anything, they were making a pilgrimage home.

Bethlehem was crowded the night of Jesus' birth only because a government edict had created stressful conditions – as usual. Everyone had to return to their family's ancestral town to be enrolled for the tax. Therefore, like many others, Joseph and a very pregnant Mary had to make a most inconvenient trip to Bethlehem because of big government.

However, God used the distress caused by government for His purposes. The circumstances of Jesus' birth were most unusual for someone who is King of the Universe. Indeed, the circumstances make it hard to believe that Jesus was king of anything, no less the universe. If you were not Christians, what would you make of a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and sleeping in a manger (a feed box for animals)?

Nevertheless, to Christians, the unique circumstances of Jesus' birth have deep significance. Not only did our Creator condescend to become human, He

¹ Luke 2:1-3

² 2 Samuel 7:16

³ Micah 5:2

condescended to be born in the most humble of circumstances. Therefore, on the night of His birth, the King of the universe was not revealed to the powerful and wealthy. He was revealed to humble shepherds on the job. Thus, God made a strong statement that the arrogant have no place in His Kingdom. The Kingdom of God belongs only to those who humble themselves under the mighty hand of God.⁴

Now, according to the biblical narrative, Jesus, Mary and Joseph actually were refugees for a short period of time, but not in Bethlehem. Again, this was because of a politician – King Herod the Great.⁵ The wise men brought Herod news that a baby had been born, King of the Jews. Herod found out from the biblical prophecies that this King would be born in Bethlehem. Therefore, he did another thing earthly politicians love to do. He eliminated potential opposition. Only He did so by having all the baby boys of Bethlehem under two years of age killed.⁶ These are the Holy Innocents, Martyrs.

But, little did Herod realize that he also was playing into the hands of God. Six hundred years before Jesus, God told the prophets that His Messiah, His Son would come up out of Egypt. That prophecy was fulfilled when Herod died a short time later and Joseph and Mary could return to Nazareth with Jesus. Wicked Herod got used! His attempt to destroy Messiah failed and fulfilled God's Word.

Babies

Based on the gospel for the first Sunday of Christmas, Luke 2:22-40

Now, holding a newborn child in your arms is always an adventure. You have no idea who you have, or what they will become. Only God can know who a newborn will be. Therefore, it's quite significant when prophecy is made over a newborn child. And that's exactly what happened with Jesus.

According to Leviticus chapter 12 a woman giving birth to a son is ceremonially unclean for seven days following birth. On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised and given his name. Then the woman is to wait another thirty-three days for her purification to be complete. It says in Leviticus 12:4, "She must not touch anything sacred or go to the sanctuary until the days of her purification are over."

Therefore, our gospel lesson this morning takes place about forty days after Jesus' birth. Mary had reached the end of her purification – seven plus thirty-three. Thus, Mary was permitted to enter the temple with Joseph to present Jesus to the Lord according to the command found in Exodus chapter 13.

While doing so, the couple was approached by two devout old timers, Simeon and Anna. Simeon took Jesus in his arms and pronounced the words that have been sung for centuries in various worship services of the church – Luke 2:29-32, "29 'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. 30

⁴ 1 Peter 5:6

⁵ Matthew 2:13

⁶ Matthew 2:16-18

For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

Simeon was saying he could die in peace having seen the salvation of God in the flesh. Therefore, by speaking these words Simeon prophesied that the newborn Jesus is the salvation of humanity – the Messiah. In harmony with three Old Testament prophecies from Isaiah, Simeon also prophesied that Jesus would be a light to the gentiles as well as the glory of God’s people Israel.

This is most significant because Messiah is from the Jews and promised to the Jews. Yet, God made it clear six hundred years before Jesus that through Messiah He would also have mercy on all the nations of earth lost in their paganism. Indeed, we’re here today because Jesus is the prophesied light to all the gentile nations of earth. Therefore, what God promised in Isaiah should be very precious to all us gentiles. Here’s one example of God’s promise found in Isaiah 42:6-7, “6 ‘I, the LORD, have called you [the Messiah] in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people [Israel] and a light for the Gentiles, 7 to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.” Simeon was blessed to see the Lord’s fulfillment of a verse like this in the person of the baby Jesus.

We are blessed to see what the Lord has done over the last 2,000 years of history to fulfill His Word. Despite some of the most severe persecution in the church’s history, this very day Christ’s Church continues to bring light to gentiles the world over, and even to some within Israel. Let us be humbled to know that we are among those He has called.

Simeon also gave a prophecy that was blessing as well as doom. Jesus has been, is and will be responsible for the rising and falling of many – in Israel. The God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses has called all Israel to look to Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfillment of His salvation and the glory of Israel. At the present time some Israelites will. Most won’t.

St. Paul described the problem this way in 1 Corinthians 1:22-25, “22 Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.” God nailed to a cross by the judgment of rebellious humanity is a real problem. God dying on a cross is an even bigger problem. It cannot and does not compute. But such is the wisdom and strength of God. Like birth in a stable, the cross cannot be received by the arrogant and rebellious. It can only be received by those who have been humbled under the mighty hand of God.

If anyone gets beyond the stumbling block and foolishness of the cross, it’s only by the doing of God’s Holy Spirit. The only way to love the old rugged cross is by a spiritual rebirth. Those who love the cross have been called to Jesus Christ, the power and wisdom of God – the King of kings and Lord of lords. If you love Christ’s cross, consider it the very great blessing from Almighty God. His foolishness is wiser than all our wisdom. And you have entered the foolishness of God through the forgiveness of your sins proclaimed by Christ crucified and Christ resurrected.

Microscopes

One last Christmas meditation. At lunch on Thursday, Carol was out with her cousin. Therefore, alone, I was meditating on the beauty of the day since I had been outside doing the final clearing of leaves from the property. I got to thinking about the Creation and I said to myself, "It's a marvel!" Then I said to the Lord, "And you, its Creator, are a marvel! Who is like you, O Lord?"

This led me in two directions. First it got me thinking of some things I had seen recently on the internet that demolish the pagan idea of an eternal, infinite, self-existing, self-creating universe. Second it got me to thinking about the gospel lesson for Christmas Day, John 1:1-14.

Paganism gives the universe credit for the creation of all things. In the Western form of paganism known as Philosophical Naturalism, Darwin's evolutionary theory plays a huge role. Yet, that theory was severely challenged in 1996 when biochemist, Michael J. Behe, published a watershed book called Darwin's Black Box.

Advances in microscope technology have enabled us to magnify things 50,000 times. Therefore, we have been able to delve into the minute parts of plant and animal cells as well as single celled organisms. Scientists have discovered that cells contain numerous microscopic machines with very specific parts and a variety of very specific functions. For instance, there are little molecular "trucks" that carry supplies from one end of the cell to the other. In plant cells there are tiny machines that turn sunlight into energy.

One particular cellular machine attracted the attention of [Michael Behe](#). It's called the flagellum. The flagellum is a little tail by which single celled creatures or single cells can propel themselves. The only human cells that have a flagellum are sperm cells.

It turns out that this little tail has numerous mechanical moving parts mounted in a very specific fashion. When Behe looked at the flagellum what he saw was an miniature outboard motor propelling the cell through a liquid. Howard Burg at Harvard has called the flagellum the most efficient machine in the universe.

Just like an outboard motor, a flagellum has a number of parts, all of which are necessary to make the motor work. To date, no one has been able to offer an adequate Darwinian explanation of how a rotary motor like the flagellum can arise in nature from nothing through a series of minute changes.

From his work, Michael Behe coined a new term, "Irreducible Complexity." It means that all the parts of a machine have to be there for the machine to function. If one is missing, the machine doesn't function at all. Think of the standard mousetrap. If one of its pieces is missing or defective, the mechanism will not work. All the parts must be present simultaneously for the trap to do its job.

When applied to Darwinian evolution, this means that all 40 parts of the flagellum have to be present and working in order for the flagellum to give an organism any kind of advantage in natural selection.

Not only do all the parts have to be present, but the information necessary to create and assemble the parts in the proper sequence must be present as a new cell is formed from cell division. In addition, the molecular machines necessary to do the creating and assembly also have to be present.

The Darwinian model of successive, slight modifications creating new organs and even new species cannot explain this complexity at all. A partially formed flagellum waiting to be evolved into a fully functioning flagellum gives absolutely no advantage to an organism in natural selection. In fact, it will most likely be jettisoned through evolution. Therefore, everything must be present and working to gain advantage in natural selection. This is irreducible complexity.

Horror of horrors to the pagan Naturalist doctrine of origins, the irreducible complexity found in living things points toward design, and extremely intelligent design at that. And this points to a designer of unimaginable intelligence. Enter Yahweh.

The Christmas Day gospel lesson says in John 1:1-3, “1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” This means that Jesus was present in union with the Father at the creation of all things. Irreducible complexity is His idea – the idea of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Now, we read in John 1:14, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” This means that for our sake the awesome Creator of the cell became a bundle of cells Himself – and dwelt on earth as a mortal human being. Like God on a cross, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the God/man is beyond logic and comprehension. It is the marvel of Christmas. Again, it is the foolishness of God trumping all the wisdom of humans.

And in this foolishness there is great good news for you and I. We’re promised in John 1:12-13, “12... to all who received him [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.”

Becoming a child born of God is the greatest destiny a human being can have. And through the forgiveness of our sins, it is our right. Remember. You are what you believe you are. And in belief it’s God’s Word against all other words. Let us pray that Lord Holy Spirit will humble us to believe God’s Word on this sixth day of Christmas. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.