

CHRISTMAS EVE
December 24 2009
the Rev. Ken Kroohs
[\(Isaiah 9:2-7; Pslam 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20\)](#)

WHY HAVE CHRISTMAS ??

St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, High Point, NC

MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH ... AND THE MEDITATIONS OF
ALL OUR HEARTS ... BE ALWAYS ACCEPTABLE TO YOU ____
OUR STRENGTH AND OUR REDEEMER AMEN

Those of you who do not know me
may be surprised to learn how I tend
to see things slightly off center, and
then ask the unusual question. I was
reminded of my own tendency this week
when I spent some time with my
grandchildren. Notice that it
took me two sentences to work them
into the sermon!!

One of the grand kids was doing
what kids always do, and always **should**
do ... she kept asking "why?" Why do
we do it that way? What shouldn't I
do that? That question is essential
for kids to learn. Unfortunately we
stop asking that question. I guess we
believe we already know all the
answers.

So allow me to step into the kids role and ask "why?". Why was Jesus born? Why did God choose to do it all this way? (The same basic question applies to Jesus death but you have to come back in the spring to hear that discussion!!)

Why? Think about it. All we know comes from a couple stories about the birth ... stories which are not exactly the same. Then we have only one account of some shepherds and another of three foreign dignitaries ... the wise men ... coming to visit. Finally a couple sentences about visiting the temple when he is 12 years old. THAT'S IT! We are told nothing else.

Two of the gospel writers never even mention the birth. Saint Paul alluded to it in a couple places but never finds it important enough to discuss. The birth is given so little scriptural attention that many people argue it is a fabrication designed to

parallel many pagan myths.

So why? Assuming this is not a fabrication and is actually what God planned, and did, then why?

Honestly, I am not absolutely positive I know the answer! But I do have a thought. An explanation that works for me. A reason that makes sense for me.

Consider first why the birth may not have gotten as much attention as we might expect. The Jewish people were expecting a might king, a warrior! To make a big deal out of a baby born in a stable very likely would have **reduced** Jesus' appeal ... Jesus' influence. So mentioning it without making it very central in the teachings probably was appropriate.

Doesn't mean the birth did not happen. Doesn't mean it is unimportant. It just means that for the first century audiences other

things were MORE important. It may even mean that the birth is more important to us, to our generation than it was to people in 1st century Israel.

For us, for our generation who have grown up knowing about a messiah who preached love and peace rather than war – being told about a humble birth adds to the power of the teachings.

Even so – why? Why have the birth mentioned at all? Why not simply have a full grown Jesus come wandering out of the desert to speak with John the Baptist? If His birth, and especially His childhood are of so little importance, why would God go through it in the first place?

Entire libraries ... not just a few books but entire libraries have been written around this question! Or actually around the broader question of Jesus death. The boarder question

concerns why Jesus became human ...
the jargon term is "become incarnate"
... the "incarnation" meaning to
become human.

Why bother? Wouldn't it be more
effective to rearrange the stars and
write the "obey God" command in the
sky? I know I would be more
impressed! And scared not to obey!

Or even better, why not just snap
the God fingers and change human
beings into an obedient race? Change
us so we knew what we should do ----
and DID IT! .. With a snap of the
fingers end all pain and suffering ..
Why not?

OK, here are my thoughts. The key
is that for some reason God decided to
create us with free will. **If** it is
possible for God to regret a decision
I suspect giving us free will is the
one God regrets!!

God decided to give us free will

and I believe that actually is the lesson in the Garden of Eden story. The account's importance is not about ribs, or apples, or fig leaves but that God gave us instructions but not commands in the sense that we HAD to obey. We were given instructions and the ability to obey, or not.

Accept that for a moment while considering the implications. If God choose to give us free will, then God must do whatever is possible to **convince us** to obey. By giving us free will God gave up the option of **requiring** our obedience.

Some people believe and teach that rather than **requiring** obedience God uses threats and fear to push us into line. I disagree – but that would be another long discussion so we will pass on it right now.

I believe that instead of threats and fears God uses promises and love to attract us.

AND, here is the key point, **we don't pay attention or believe God!!**
Oh, we claim we do but honestly, when we take a deep, honest look at ourselves we MIGHT find we do better than some other people but not great. We don't even approach, much less live up to God's desires, God's dream for us.

And that lack of belief is that we don't believe it is worth the effort. We don't believe the return on investment is worth the effort. We might believe that the long term, life after death return on investment is worthwhile but not doing much during this life for return during this life. Despite God's promises - we doubt.

So, let's take all that as a given for a moment: (1) God created us with free will, (2) we seldom live up to God's dream for us, and (3) God would prefer to use promises and love to threats and fear. Assuming those points, what would God need to do?

What would God need to do to influence much less convince first century Jews and 21st century Americans?

I think we can agree that whatever God did to influence us it would have to be something pretty dramatic. Something to break through our hard heads, our resistance, our egos.

And part of the reason for our resistance is the impression there is a large gap between us and God. That **if** God exists, then God is so different from us there is little connection.

So God is faced with the challenge of making us believe God cares for us loves us enough to make us want to be in relationship with God. God wants to be in relationship with us, but we have to want to be in relationship with God.

What better way to help us understand that God understands, that

God knows us then to live with us for a while? NOT that God had to learn about us. We had to learn that God knew about us.

Obviously in one lifetime Jesus could not go through ever challenge, and every joy possible! And we know very little about His youth but based on what we do know about the area we can safely assume Jesus knew poverty, unemployment, hunger, sickness, death ... Jesus knew celebrations, births, successes. If not personally than certainly He witnessed all of these.

When we go to God in prayer we can go knowing God understands.

So if God does understand then why doesn't God end all unemployment, all disease, all pain? Back to point number one, for some reason God wants us to have free will. If God ends all problems and makes us simply puppets – that is not free will. And I suspect, few of us would want that.

So like the good friend who cannot just give us a job, God walks with us through the pain. Like the good friend who cannot cure our cancer, God is there to sit with us. And sometimes like a good friend, God turns to other friends to provide us with help. Remember God, COULD make those changes but not without taking away our free will.

Jesus' birth matters because it is the birth that makes possible our belief in His life. Jesus' birth matters because it is the birth that allows us to have faith God understands us.

Jesus' birth matters or does it? Whether Jesus' birth matters is our decision, not God's.

We have previous sermons on our website. To read an earlier recent sermon just enter: www.st-christopher.org/sermon.html.

[CLICK HERE TO RESPOND](#): I would enjoy reading your comments about this sermon. Please feel free to discuss content or presentation. (If you wish to use another email system send your comments to: *ken@st-christopher.com*)