

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Monday, December 24, 2007
Christmas Eve**

THE CHRISTMAS STORY ACCORDING TO JESUS

Hebrews 10:5-10

This evening we have heard the familiar words of the Christmas story according to Luke (Luke 2). The Bible also includes the Christmas story according to Matthew, in Matthew 1, which begins this way: “This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about” (Matthew 1:18). Then there is the Christmas story according to John, in John 1, which says: “In the beginning was the Word,” and declares the astonishing truth that “the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the only begotten, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14).

Tonight I want to invite you to consider and contemplate the Christmas story from the lips of Jesus Himself. It is found here in Hebrews 10, where the author of Hebrews takes the words of David in Psalm 40 and applies them to the Lord Jesus.

Listen to what David wrote in Psalm 40:6-8:

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but a body You have prepared for me;
burnt offerings and sin offerings You did not require.
Then I said, “Here I am, I have come –
it is written about me in the scroll.
I desire to do Your will, O my God;
Your law is within my heart.

The Greek Septuagint text of the Old Testament has this reading (which the author of Hebrews quotes): “A body You have prepared for me.”

The Hebrew text of Psalm 40 has a different reading. Instead of “a body You have prepared for me,” it says: “My ears You have pierced.”

What could that mean? Just this: The law of Moses included this provision for the people of Israel. If a servant declined the opportunity to be set free and preferred instead to remain in the service of his or her master for life, Moses instructed the people to pierce the ear of the servant as a sign of the servant’s lifelong commitment and desire to serve the master. The one whose ear was pierced would become a servant for life (Exodus 21:6; Deuteronomy 15:17).

If we follow the Hebrew reading of this verse, David was saying that he was God’s servant for life. As was Jesus. If we follow the Greek Septuagint reading (which is the reading adopted by the author of Hebrews in Hebrews 10), we can see it as a reference to

the incarnation of Christ (“a body You prepared for me”) and His suffering in the body on our behalf.

So, it says in Hebrews 10, “when Christ came into the world,” He applied the words of Psalm 40 to Himself and fulfilled them in a complete and redemptive way. He said: “A body You prepared for me” (Hebrews 10:5) and “I have come to do Your will, O God” (10:7).

What, then, can we learn tonight from the Christmas story according to Jesus? We learn, first of all, not only that Jesus was born, not only that Jesus came into the world, but that *He came into the world for a purpose*. He lived, if you will, a purpose-driven life. What was that purpose? To do God’s will, from beginning to end. He said: “I have come to do Your will, O God.” And what was God’s will for Him? Very simply, God’s will was for His Son to die on a cross to save us from our sins and to reconcile us to God. It was God’s will for Jesus to be our Savior. That is why Jesus was born. That is why Jesus came. That is why Jesus took on our flesh and blood and made His dwelling among us. He was born to die. Born to die for us.

Listen to what Jesus had to say about Himself and His purpose elsewhere in the New Testament:

In John 6:38, for example, Jesus said: “I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but to do the will of Him who sent me.”

In Matthew 20:28, referring to Himself as the Son of Man, He said: “The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” The offering of His life as a ransom – to pay the penalty for our sins and to set us free from them – was the purpose of His life. It was the reason for Christmas.

Again, in Luke 19:10, after bringing salvation to the house of Zacchaeus, Jesus said: “The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” He came to seek and to save lost sinners. And He accomplished His purpose by giving His life as an atoning sacrifice for our sins on the cross. The shadow of the cross hung over His life from the moment of His birth – and even before.

As the time of His death on the cross drew near, Jesus explained to His disciples the purpose behind His coming in John 12. Andrew and Philip came to Jesus and told Him there were some people who wanted to meet Him. In response Jesus said:

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds... Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? “Father, save me from this hour?” No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name!

Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.”

Jesus said to the crowd:

This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.

He said this, John says, to show the kind of death He was going to die (John 12:23-24, 27-28, 30-33).

The purpose of Jesus' life was His death – His death on the cross. It was, as He said in John 12, for this very reason that He came. To say it another way, the cross is the purpose of Christmas.

The apostle Paul expresses it this way. In 1 Timothy 1:15, he says: “This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” You can take that to heart and depend on it.

Elsewhere, in Galatians 4, Paul says: “When the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, so that we might receive the full rights of sons” (4:4-5). He came, as Eugene Peterson describes it, to “redeem those of us who have been kidnapped (held hostage) by the law. Thus we have been set free to experience our rightful heritage” as God’s adopted children through faith.

Why did Jesus come into the world? He came into the world to save sinners. And that designation describes all of us. He came to redeem us by taking the punishment we deserve and paying the penalty for our sin. As John 3:17 reminds us, “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.”

Jesus came into the world for a purpose. The eternal Son of God left all the glories of heaven and humbled Himself by taking on a human body in order to die for us, to save us from our sins.

John MacArthur points out a side of the Christmas story that is not often told: The soft little hands of baby Jesus, fashioned by the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb, were made so that nails might be driven through them. His baby feet, chubby and unable to walk, would one day walk up a dusty hill to be nailed to a cross. That sweet infant’s head with sparkling eyes and eager mouth was formed so that some day men might force a crown of thorns onto it. That tender body, warm and soft, wrapped in cloths, would one day be ripped open by a spear. Jesus was born to die.

MacArthur emphasizes that this is not meant to put a damper on your Christmas spirit. To the contrary. For though Jesus’ death was devised and carried out by men with evil intentions, it was not a tragedy. Rather, it represents the greatest victory over evil ever accomplished. And Jesus did it. He did it for us.

Jesus came into the world for a purpose. And the truth is that no one else could fulfill His purpose. No one else could do what Jesus came to do. There is no substitute for Christ's sacrifice.

Clearly, all the animal sacrifices in the world could never accomplish what Jesus did, because, as it says in Hebrews 10:4, "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." You and I could never take the punishment or pay the penalty for someone else's sin, because we deserve the death penalty for our own sin. But Jesus, the eternal Son of God who came as a baby and lived a sinless life, has the right qualifications. He alone has the right stuff to take the punishment we deserve and to pay the penalty we owe because of our sin.

As it says of Jesus in Isaiah 53:

He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows.
He was pierced for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities.
The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him,
and by His wounds we are healed (53:4-5).

Nobody else could do what Jesus came to do. And He did it for us. He came into the world for a purpose. And He accomplished that purpose. The cross was the purpose of Christmas.

There is one more thing I want you to see tonight. Not only did Jesus come into the world for a purpose, *He took delight in doing the Father's will*. Jesus was not an unwilling participant in God's unfolding plan of salvation. He did not come into the world kicking and screaming against His will. He was not an unwilling victim of an evil conspiracy when He went to the cross. He did not leave behind the glories of heaven and step across the stars to Bethlehem – and ultimately to the cross of Calvary – reluctantly or unwillingly. It was the desire of His heart. He came, and He suffered and died on the cross, as it says in Hebrews 12:2, "for the joy set before Him." It gave Jesus joy to accomplish your salvation and mine by His death on the cross.

What an amazing gift that is! What amazing love!

Jesus came into the world for a purpose. He came to do the will of God. It was God's will for Him to give His life on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. Like a rose trampled on the ground, Jesus took the fall and thought of us – you and me and a world of lost sinners – above all.

How can we ever repay the Lord for all His goodness to us? It cannot be done. It is impossible. But we can do this: With thankful and humble hearts, we can bow before Him and give Him the gift He most desires this Christmas – the gift of our love, the gift of our worship, the gift of our faith, the gift of our selves to be His and to live for Him and His purposes all our days.

May it be so in us.

This is the Christmas story according to Jesus;

“A body You prepared for me... Here I am – it is written about me in the scroll – I have come to do Your will, O God.”

Ponder that in your heart tonight, and praise God for Christmas. Amen.