

An Extraordinary Visitation Part 2

We have been preparing our hearts to celebrate the birth of our Lord. Pastor Brian mentioned this week that someone had suggested **Focus less on the presents and more on the Presence.** I like that. I wonder if the church shouldn't move Advent away from this traditional Christmas season that has become so pagan and commercial. We could give this holiday to the world and then come up with another time to honor and celebrate the birth of Christ.

We have been talking about what Christmas is all about, this extraordinary visit when God became man and visited us. Two texts we've referred to – the first in the Psalms, **“What is man that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?” Psalm 8:4.** The second found in Luke's gospel, spoken by John the Baptist's father, **“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people.” Luke 1:68.** God has visited us and has brought redemption to us through Christ. What an extraordinary visit and what an extraordinary visitor.

Last week and again this morning we are focusing upon the meaning for us of this extraordinary visitation. I ran across an ancient hymn this week, written by St. Romanos the Melodist in the sixth century. Let me share a couple of stanzas with you as we reflect on this extraordinary visitation.

**“Today the Virgin gives birth to Him who is above all being
and the earth offers a cave to Him whom no one can approach.
Angels with shepherds give glory and Magi journey with a star,
for to us there has been born
a little Child, God before the ages.**

**Bethlehem has opened Eden, come, let us see;
We have found delight in secret,
come let us receive the joys of Paradise within the cave.
There the unwatered root whose blossom is forgiveness has appeared;
There has been found the undug well
from which David once longed to drink.
There a Virgin has born a babe**

and has quenched at once Adam's and David's thirst.

For this, let us hasten to the place where there has been born

a little Child, God before the ages.

St. Romanos the Melodist

What an extraordinary visitor. What an extraordinary child, God before the ages.

Last Sunday I shared five reasons for this divine visitation, five benefits that came to us as a result of his extraordinary visitation. I shared with you then that Jesus came

1. To explain the Father to us

2. To satisfy the requirements of justice and the law

3. To reveal in plain fashion God's plan of grace

4. To reconcile God and man

5. To establish peace for us. Let me continue now with 5 more reasons for this divine visitation.

6. His extraordinary visitation liberated us from bondage. Jesus came to a people that certainly understood about bondage. The Jewish people had been slaves in Egypt and in Babylon for hundreds of years. They knew what it was to be enslaved. They still knew about powerlessness as the Romans occupied their country and controlled their lives. They were longing for a Messiah who would come and liberate them from political bondage and make them free, but Jesus came for an even greater and higher purpose. He came not to simply liberate one tiny nation from political bondage, but instead, to liberate all of humanity from bondage to sin, Satan and self.

The truth is, since Adam and Eve's sin in the garden we've been captives of our own sinful desires. All of us have found ourselves doing things we didn't want to do, things we knew were displeasing to God. All of us have known the shame of sin and have found our selves submitting more to Satan's purposes and our selfish desires than to the plan and purpose of God. Many of us have battled with addiction to sin and to harmful habits in our lives, behavior that we knew was destructive, yet we seemed driven to it, even to our own physical and spiritual detriment. Bondage to drugs and alcohol, sexual addiction of all kinds, addiction to food, to drink, bondage and addiction

to a thousand different things that control us and trap us and defeat us. How do we get free?

In the letter to the believers in Rome, Paul spoke about being a prisoner of the law of sin at work within himself. He made the discovery all of us need to make. I'm a wretched man in need of a Savior. I'm a sinner. Paul cried out, "Who can help me? Who can deliver me from myself and my sin?" Look at Paul's question and his answer? **"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 7:23-25.**

We have been prisoners of our own sinful desires, our own lust, living lives that were not pleasing to God, but Jesus said he had come to set the prisoners free! Who can liberate us and deliver us? Thanks be to God, Jesus has come to set us free! Jesus said **"If the Son sets you free you will be free indeed."** John 8:36 We have been set free from bondage to sin. Sin doesn't have the power to control us any longer if we have placed our faith and trust in Christ and we are determined to walk with him.

Paul goes on to tell us that Jesus has liberated us from bondage to guilt and condemnation over the past as well. He tells us "If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old things have passed away and the new has come." Paul declares **"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."** Romans 8:1-2. How did this happen? How can we be delivered from the heavy weight and burden of sin and condemnation? We couldn't free ourselves, but Paul says God did it for us, "by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering." Romans 8:4

The visitation means we are liberated and free to obey Christ and experience life as it was designed to be experienced. The Christmas story is a message of liberation to all of us. You don't have to be bound to sin any longer. Jesus has come to make us free!

7. His extraordinary visitation liberated us from the fear of death. An often quoted passage from the book of Hebrews declares, **"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is the devil – and free those who all their**

lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” Hebrews 2:14-15. Satan held this planet captive with a death threat but Jesus delivered us from that fear of death by stripping the devil of his power of death. Death is an enemy. Death was defeated at the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, but I think we can say that death has not yet been totally disarmed. We still feel the pain and sting of death but the victory of the grave has been shattered and the death threat no longer has power to frighten or intimidate us.

There has been recent talk about the fact that Jesus has delivered us from the sting of death and because of that believers aren't supposed to sorrow. That's not what the bible says. It says we do not sorrow as those who are without hope, but folks, when your loved one dies, there is sorrow, there is grief. We weep, just like Jesus wept at the graveside of Lazarus. It's not a sin to grieve or to sorrow. The literal translation of that verse in 1 Thessalonians 4 where Paul says he doesn't want us to be uninformed about those who have fallen asleep or died, "...lest you grieve as also the rest not having hope". Paul didn't want us to grieve like the hopeless because we aren't like the hopeless. We have hope. Grieve like those who have hope, who are going to see their loved ones again in the presence of the Lord but between now and then, we miss them and feel sorrow at our loss and separation.

And what about that death where is your sting thing. We've been delivered from that, right? So death doesn't sting us and we shouldn't act sad or like we are in pain? That's not what the bible says either. It says, **“I tell you a mystery....the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed...when the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, THEN the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Corinthians 15:54-57**

Jesus came to liberate us from the grip and fear of death. It isn't final any longer. Jesus told us in John 14 not to let our hearts be troubled – to believe in God and to believe in him. Death wasn't the end because he was going to prepare a place

for us in heaven where we could be with him forever. Death doesn't frighten me because you can't scare me or threaten me with heaven!

You may have lost a loved one in recent days. The good news is, Immanuel is here. God is with you and if your loved one placed their faith in Christ, then they are with the Lord. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Your loved one is not held in Satan's grasp or in death's unbreakable grasp any longer. Jesus came to break Satan's bondage. He rose victorious with the keys to death, hell and the grave. He reigns now as the risen Savior and Lord. His coming as a baby set the stage for the showdown and victory of life over death and the grave. Thanks be to God who gives us this glorious victory through Christ Jesus our Lord.

8. His extraordinary visitation liberates us from hopelessness and despair. On the night of his birth the angel announced to the shepherds, **“Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:10-11**

Into a world destined to die stepped a Savior offering eternal life. In a world void of joy a baby's cry broke through the night and produced rejoicing that filled the heavens with praise.

In your bitter night of despair and pain there is yet good news. Joy to the world, the Lord has come and with his coming there is life and where there is life there is hope. Don't abandon your hope. Don't give up. The angels told the shepherds, **“And this shall be a sign to you: you will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.” Luke 2:12.** There is a sign for you. Not just a baby in a manger but a risen and living Savior and Lord who is ready and able to help you and deliver you and give you peace. He is the risen Lord who is among us in power and ready to show us his mercy and grace. He has come that you might have life and have it even more abundantly than you can imagine. Don't let despair or hopelessness overwhelm you. Jesus has come to liberate you and give you hope.

In the world I see no hope, no way, no peace. But in Jesus, he is the way, the truth and the life. He is the one and only source of hope for us and for the world.

Thank God he visited us and brought hope to the hopeless.

9. His extraordinary visitation means we are no longer alone. One of the heaviest

burdens borne by so many today is loneliness. That fearful thought that you could live and die and no one would notice or care or mourn your passing – that you really are alone.

I've got good news for you. That overwhelming aloneness was broken at Bethlehem when God became man and dwelt among us. Isaiah 7:14 says, "**The Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and call his name Immanuel – [which means God with us].**" **Isaiah 7:14.** God is with us and that means you aren't alone anymore! You may feel lonely today, but you aren't alone.

That promise was not simply because he showed up as a baby in Bethlehem. Before he ascended to heaven Jesus said, "**And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**" **Matthew 28:20.** He came to be among us and he promised his presence to be with us from now on. In John's gospel Jesus assured his followers that he would not leave them alone. Even though he was returning to heaven he would send the Holy Spirit, the Comforter and he will live with you and will be in you. Jesus said "I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you." John 14:17-18.

We aren't alone anymore! On Calvary Jesus looked up from that cross and cried out "My God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus experienced a soul-wrenching aloneness, bearing our sins and because of that, also bearing the abandonment of his father – and he did all of that so we could be saved and so he could say to us, "You don't have to be alone. Come to me and be saved. I will never leave you nor forsake you. Come to me and find life."

I remember a preacher named Lyle Noah speaking here many years ago. He told the story of a group of 10 year old boys in a neighborhood bible club in the inner city. They asked about hell – what it was like – and the teacher told them to look it up and they would talk about it next time. They returned and one boy said it was a place of wailing and gnashing their teeth. One boy said it was a place of fire and torment. One boy said Jesus is the light of the world and he isn't there so hell must be a really dark place. One little boy said, "In heaven you know as you are known. You know everybody. Hell is the opposite of heaven. You won't know anybody. I don't want to go to hell because there is torment and screams and darkness and you are totally alone,

forever. I've been alone since I was 6 years old. I don't want to go to hell and be all alone. I want to get saved."

Hell is not a party with your buddies. It's no beer bust forever. Hell is the absence of God's presence. Hell is totally alone with only your memories and regrets. Hell is alone and without hope.

You that are alone today – there is a Savior who has come to be among us so we won't ever have to be alone again. And you that are feeling lonely - as painful and difficult as that can be, remember even in your loneliness, Jesus is with you. He has promised to go with you even to the end of the age. Keep looking to him.

10. His extraordinary visitation means redemption! The bottom line is found in Luke 1. We've quoted it several times this month. **"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people." Luke 1:68.** He has visited us and accomplished redemption for his people. That's what it's all about. That's why this extraordinary visitation from this extraordinary visitor, so that we might be redeemed from our sin.

He purchased us, liberated us, accepted us, made us heirs, children, part of the family. He gave us a new song to sing. Not just Joy to the World the Lord has come, but also "Redeemed how I love to proclaim it, redeemed by the blood of the lamb, redeemed through his infinite mercy, his child and forever I am!

What a visit, what a visitor, and what a glorious purpose fulfilled in this extraordinary visitation.

He explained the Father to us

He satisfied the requirements of justice and the law

He revealed plainly God's amazing plan of grace

He reconciled us to God

He established peace

He liberated us from bondage to sin, Satan and self

He liberated us from the fear of death

He liberated us from hopelessness and despair

He liberated us from aloneness

He brought to us redemption.

What an extraordinary visitation. What an extraordinary visitor. He has accomplished for us our redemption. We leave the manger rejoicing. Christ has come and we are set free. Immanuel has come and we are not alone anymore. We are reconciled to God and we have perfect peace in Christ. We have been redeemed.

If you are tired of living in fear, in bondage, in sin, I've got good news. Jesus paid a visit so you wouldn't have to live like that any longer. Come to him.

Lyle Noah's Story of Callus. Died alone. No one coming to funeral. I didn't think that was possible, to live and die in America and no one come to your funeral. "It didn't have to be this way." There is hope for you. There is room under God's grace for you. There is room at the cross for you. Jesus came for you. Open your heart to him today. "It doesn't have to be this way."