

Text: Luke 2:6-7.

Christmas Eve 2016.

Christmas. Just that one word brings back so many memories. Christmas. As Ralphie said in the movie, *Christmas Story*, it was the day the whole kid world revolved around. Be honest, many of you are going to watch that movie, maybe more than once over the next 24 hours. Christmas. Has the day, the celebration, been left for kids? Now, there's some cool parts of that. We are celebrating the birth of a child, right? Children can relate. If you have ever been to a children's Christmas service, it's really cool seeing the children up front, hearing them recite these words, "While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born. And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in strips of cloth and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them."

But have you continued recited those words as an adult? Does it even sound strange to hear those words recited by an adult this evening? Have we let Christmas end with a baby, in a manger and not walked with him to the cross, the tomb? Have we even grown tired of Christmas, the hassle of visiting every family member, the busy-ness of all the stuff going on, that maybe you are even a little bit happy it's almost all over, at least until you have to take back the gifts you don't want, fix the toys that are sure to break, wipe the tears from the meltdown, I didn't get what I wanted! Yeah, our sin gets in the way even at Christmas.

Maybe we are just looking in the wrong place, for the wrong stuff. See in that manger not just a baby, but a boy who grew up, living every day as your perfect Substitute. See a man who needed no fixing, but who fixed our biggest problem of all: our sin. See the perfect present of forgiveness for all your sins that you never need to take back. Look and see that maybe you won't get everything you wanted, but God has already given you everything you needed: a holy status to see him in heaven, full payment for all your sins and guilt. Those are gifts that aren't just for children. They're for everyone. Don't let children have all the fun at Christmas. See your Savior in the manger and Christmas will never get old, or tired. You will never get weary or worn out hearing this good news: while they were there, the time came for the baby to be born. And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Let's take a more adult look at those verses. The time came, more literally, the days were fulfilled. Fulfilled refers to God keeping his promises. God promised a Savior and God kept his promise. God promised that all things work together for good those who love him. God has kept that promise. God promised, "I solved your biggest problem of sin. I'll solve every other problem as well. I provided for your greatest need. I'll provide for every other need as well." Those aren't promises fulfilled just for children. Those are promises for all.

The days were fulfilled for her to give birth. And she gave birth. She gave birth. It's just one word in the original language. One word! She gave birth. God has a way of recording the greatest events in history with just one word. She gave birth. One word. It is finished. One word. He is risen. One word. Jesus himself is called the Word. Just one word to enter our world, take away our sin, rise and live forever. She gave birth. Just one word.

To her firstborn. Now that word firstborn can mean the first of many. And we don't have to get into Jesus having brothers and sisters. There's something more than that. Jesus is called the firstborn from the dead. He rose and so many, many more will follow him in rising from the dead. Firstborn is a word to indicate superiority, preeminence. Jesus Christ is called the firstborn and ruler over all creation. This baby keeps your car on the road and even when it's icy, he sends his angels to watch over you as you drive to grandma's house. This baby directed every circumstance to bring you here tonight to hear this good news of great joy. She gave birth to her firstborn, a Son.

A Son, think capital s. The Son of God. The Savior of all the world. Think about this. The Son of God is also Mary's son. Maybe we need the faith of children to believe that one. Or maybe we need to contemplate as adults the wonder and miracles of Christmas. The creator of all things became a creature. Wow! That's not just kids' stuff. Our most powerful helper was helpless, the most helpless of all, a baby. The one who lived in heaven came to earth. The one who was everywhere, confined himself to a manger. The one with all the riches in all the universe became the poorest, born in a barn, wrapped in cloths, placed in a manger, so that we have riches that are out of this world: eternal life, unconditional forgiveness and love. I don't care how young or old you are, you can never get to the bottom of that miracle, that sacrifice, that humility.

Think of the humble circumstances for the birth of the king of all the world. Born in a barn, well, maybe not in a barn. Maybe just as likely a cave. Why build a barn with wood you don't have if there's a perfectly good cave to keep your animals? Then make this connection. Jesus born in a cave, laid in a cave at birth, laid in a cave after his death and came back to life in a cave after his death. Wrapped in cloths in a cave at his birth. Wrapped in cloths in a cave at his death. Leaving behind those cloths in rising from dead, from that cave.

And maybe, just maybe, that manger wasn't the wooden feed box we often see in pictures, but a natural hollow in the side of the cave. Why build a wooden feed box that animals might trample, when you have a perfectly good hollow in the rock to place the food for the animals? Now, placed in a rock wearing strips of cloth at his birth. Placed in a rock wearing strips of cloth at his death. Bursting forth from the rock, folding up those strips of cloth in his rising.

But think about this. Who would look for the Christ in a cave? Who would look for the Son of Man in a manger? Who would look for a king wrapped in cloths? Well, who would look for Christ on a cross? Certainly not Jesus' enemies, and honestly, at the time not even his friends. But how many of you treasure that cross, have one on your wall, around your neck? That cross and that cradle is where we find Christ. Well, who would look for Jesus in a few drops of water? But I know many adults, right here today, who brought your children right here to have those few drops of water placed on them. Why? Because that's where Jesus promised to be found, promised to give his love and apply his forgiveness and wrap up your children in cloths of holiness. And by the way, all the baptized, children and adults, are wrapped in that holiness. Who would look for Jesus in the mouth of a man in a dress, just talking, dare we even call it the naughtiest word of all, preaching? Well, the Word became flesh. The Word, Jesus Christ, promised to come in his Word. The Word promised to be found in his Word. The Word has promised to come to us in preaching. Doesn't matter if you are a child or an adult. You will find Jesus in the same place you've found him every Christmas: this cave of birth, this cross of death, this cave of life. You will find Jesus where you have always found him. His Word, water, the Word of God, the Word of eternal life. Yes, children, you will find Jesus there. Adults, you will too. Amen.