

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Christmas Eve is here. Christians have good reason to celebrate, enjoy, and be thrilled to come and worship the newborn King. It is a time to be jubilant in praise. Joy to the world the Lord has come! The birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, God in human form, was part of God's plan even before the creation of the universe. The birth of Jesus was and is God's plan for us to be born again, born anew, born from above. Mary did give birth to Jesus. As Christians we are born twice. Our first birth is when we come out of our mama's in our birthday suit. Our second birth is when the Holy Spirit fathers, creates faith inside of us, giving us the ability to believe in Jesus Christ. God sends his grace, giving to us the faith to believe and we are regenerated, born again into a living hope. Please listen intently. God has a word for you this Christmas Eve.

Jesus, entering the human race, set in motion the fullness of God's plan. Jesus was born at just the perfect time. **Galatians 4:4-5(ESV)** <sup>4</sup>But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup>to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons [and daughters]. There has never been nor would there ever be a more perfect time for the birth of the long-awaited Messiah. God is a planner and God's plans are always perfect.

God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. In eternity past Father, Son, and Holy Spirit laid out the plan that would save you for all eternity. In eternity past God already knew you by name. God began loving you in eternity past, long before you were even born. There has never been a time that God did not love you. God loved you before time began.

Not to long ago I received a phone call from a very close relative. The first sentence was filled with inappropriate language that I don't even use when I am ticked off. I knew who it was and decided not to hang up. I was called every name in the book and then the person said, "I

am not going to speak to you ever again.” The conversation lasted 45 minutes. I wanted to say, “If you don’t want to speak to me again why did you call me?”

I use this experience to make a point and I want all of us to hear the point. The person on the phone was angry but what I recognized was a person in deep pain. In my heart I feel tremendous love for this person, but the anger and pain override any love that is being sent toward this person.

God the Father proved His love for you by sending Jesus to die on the cross. God the Father is absolutely perfect. God’s love for you is absolutely perfect. By faith we believe this to be true. If every Christian accepted the depth of God’s love, the churches would be the most populated of places in the world. When you know so deeply the depths of God’s love you want to burst forth in worship of God week after week in the company of God’s people. If every believer opened up their soul and took in the love that God offers, we would have more people in worship than any sporting arena when there is not a pandemic. God’s love draws us to worship God. Paul writes, “For I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love” (Rom.8:38). For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). We all have love tanks inside of us that only God can fill. When we spurn the love of God that is when we get in trouble, fall into sin and try to have those love tanks filled with the things of this world. During the pandemic alcohol consumption has risen as has the use of opiates and other addictive behaviors that harms one’s body and soul.

The Bible tells us that God disciplines those whom he loves. I feel like God has taken us to his woodshed during this pandemic. God wants to be number one in our lives and God has a way of chastening us. God’s perfect love has a purifying effect. God’s perfect love for you cleanses you of your unholy and sinful ways. God’s plan is for you to be holy, to be completely different from those who do not know Jesus. God’s love has a purifying impact. When we

refuse to repent, God has a loving way of exposing our sin, humbling us, and showing us that the answer to life's difficulties is one of complete surrender to God. God puts us to the test to see how strong our faith is, and I believe God is preparing us for harder times.

When Jesus was born there is what historians call the Pax Romana, the peace which existed between nationalities within the Roman Empire. Rome had a heavy hand everywhere it ruled, and it meant things were pretty much peaceful under Roman rule and occupation at this time. Prior to Augustus' rule and reign, the Mediterranean world was indeed quite dangerous overall. There were pirates on the seas, warring factions on land, robbers and thieves on all the major roads, and even civil war with the Roman Empire, plus the continuing threat of the barbarians. Augustus brought peace. In general there was peace throughout the land, a perfect time for the Messiah to be born and for the Gospel to expand (James Montgomery Boice, *The King Has Come*, pg. 104).

Secondly, there was a common language of the day, Koine Greek, the lingua franca. In other words, most of the people understand or spoke a common language that everyone understood across the entire empire. This meant the Good News of Jesus Christ could be spoken of in Jerusalem as well as in Rome using the same vocabulary and words. It was the perfect time for the Messiah to be born language-wise.

Thirdly, it was stated that all roads led to Rome. Travel at this time was easier than any time in human history with the Roman roads and highway system. The armies of Rome were great Road builders. To this day there are still places where the old Roman Roads exist and have survived history. With the peace of Rome, a common language, and a road system people could travel at ease, the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ could spread like wildfire across dry grass via the Romans roads. <sup>4</sup>But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son.

God has a way of getting His word into us and when God speaks, God expects us to listen, believe, and obey. God has special messengers the Bible calls angels. Angels are ministering spirits from God sent to serve those who will inherit salvation, messengers from heaven (Hebrews 1:14). God's plan according to God's perfect timetable was to pick a young teenage woman, probably around the age of 13, 14, or 15 it is believed, to become the most important mother in all of human history. Yes, her name was and is Mary. A supernatural miracle took place by the power of the Holy Spirit and Mary found herself pregnant without ever having close relations with a man. Try to explain that to your mother, your overly noisy aunts, or to your gossipy neighbors. "Mom, the Holy Spirit overshadowed me." In other words, Mary felt the presence of God strongly and I believe God's presence gave her great peace that what was happening inside of her was from God Himself. God's angel explained everything to Mary, what was going to happen in her and around her. "So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35b). "For no word of God will ever fail" (Luke 1:37).

When God has a message for you to hear, God has a way of getting that message to you. The question is are you listening to God? I remember when my girls were young teenagers and it hit me then how young was the woman to bear the Christ child was. Friends, Mary will be the most honored woman in heaven and rightly so. No, we will not worship Mary. We do not pray to Mary. Only God is worthy of our worship. Only Jesus is the way we get to God the Father. Having said that Mary obviously had faith in our great God, or she could have told the angel to take a hike. This church and neighboring churches have been blessed by God for God has sent us children who truly want to know Jesus, love Jesus, and live for Jesus. Every person needs Jesus in their lives. To miss out on the most important relationship ever is the biggest mistake any human can ever make.

The Holy Spirit came close to Mary and the power of the Holy Spirit helped her to believe what the angel said to her is absolute truth. She was told to fear not for she had found favor

with God. Mary was touched by the actual grace of God and inside of her the incarnation took place. God was found in the womb of Mary. This was God's doing for nothing is impossible with God.

When Mary gave birth to Jesus it was done naturally. There was no epidural, no anesthesia, no pain killers. I have been in the room when the birth was done without any medication. It is really hard on us husbands. The pain of childbirth turned to pure joy as baby Jesus took his first breath in that lowly manger.

In my heart of hearts is an ache for Jesus to be found inside every person's soul. It took an act of the Holy Spirit for Jesus to be found in Mary. It takes an act of God's Holy Spirit for any person to be found with Jesus inside. Our old human nature wants us all to deny God, ignore God, live as if God does not exist. Our old human nature denies the Bible as the true word of God. It takes a miracle from above, namely the Holy Spirit convincing us that God is who He says He is, and that God's Word is trustworthy and true. It takes a supernatural act of God to birth faith inside of us as the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus, is taught and spread. Faith comes from the hearing and the hearing of the Word of Christ.

God has plans for you. I perceive a work that God is doing today is purifying his church. God is separating the wheat from the tares, the sheep from the goats, those who are true believers from those who are faking it. God is in the process of exposing sin so that we will repent, receive forgiveness, and walk in newness of life.

Mary listened to God and Mary believed what God said to her was true. She was quite young and had a very mature faith in God. She submitted, she surrendered, she yielded her entire life to God. She accepted God's plan for her. God will highly honor her for her obedience in heaven. Seeing her Son die on the cross pierced her heart. Her heart was revived when she saw Jesus after he had risen from the dead.

Are you a Mary with Jesus living inside of you or are you barren, empty of what is most important in life? Being in a close and warm and personal relationship with Jesus is what life is all about, God's particular plan for you. It is only in knowing Jesus and listening to Jesus that life makes sense. Let us pray to that end.

Dear Heavenly Father, please send the power of the Holy Spirit to overshadow us creating soft hearts toward Jesus. May Jesus be found in every one of us and may none of us prove to be barren. Jesus, please move in permanently and forgive us all of our sins causing everyone here to be born again, born anew, born from above, saved by grace through faith. We also lift up to you the younger generation that none of them would be lost, but all found by you and saved by You. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.