

On Christmas Day, we will celebrate the birth of Christ, and that is the most important historical event in all the history of the world. It's so important to us that we number our years from it. We live two thousand and twenty-one years, give or take, after the birth of Christ. There are few things in history that come anywhere close to being that important. But Christians, is it just history? Is it something that happened long ago in the past, but doesn't have much meaning for us today? Because, honestly, when it comes to the things of the past, that's usually how we treated it: as something interesting, but not much more. Let me use an example. North Dakota as a state became a state in the year 1889. That's an interesting historical fact. It's something maybe you would remember in order to answer a trivia question. But I guarantee you that that fact doesn't change anything about your day-to-day life. You don't make decisions differently based on it. You don't go about your day doing something different than you would before. It's simply historical fact, and nothing more.

But do we treat Jesus's birth as just a historical fact? As just something that happened long ago, but does not change our lives today? Because there are certainly many who do, Christians. There are those who will go to church on Christmas, for example, and say how important it is for them, but then they never go to church the rest of the year. Showing just how important it is after all. There are many who will say that Jesus is the reason for the season and talk about how important it is to keep Christmas Christian, but then they turn around and continue walking in their sins, as if it didn't make any difference. There are many who think about Christmas the way that the world does, who think of it in terms of a secular holiday, a holiday of snow and presents and trees and not much else. Because they treat the birth of Christ as a simple historical fact. Nothing more. Nothing less. Do we do the same?

But Christians, the birth of Christ is more to us than just history. The birth of Christ, as John shows us in our reading, changes us. It transforms us. It makes our lives different. Jesus was born so that we would become Christians, so that we would become holy in his sight.

And John tells us in our reading for this evening that there are two reasons why Jesus was born. And the first one is in verse 5, where he says: "You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin." So Jesus appeared then, Jesus was born to take away sin. Jesus was born so that we would be forgiven. "For us men and for our salvation," as we say in the Nicene Creed. Jesus was born to die, born to go to the cross, so that we would be reconciled with God. And his birth is the beginning of our salvation, the beginning of our fellowship with God.

But it's more than that too. Because pay attention to what John says in the verse before this, verse 4: "Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness." So in other words, what John is talking about throughout this whole passage is what it means and what it doesn't mean to be a Christian. What it means for us to live as Christians. Because if we make a practice of sinning, if we persist in our sins, if we hold on to them, if we refuse to let them go, then we are not God. It's that simple. John says it very clearly. Even if we say that we believe in God, if we don't do what he says, how can we speak the truth? Or as he goes on to say in verse 6: "No one who abides in him keeps on sinning. No one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him." So in other words, if we persist in our sins, if we hold on to them contrary to God's will, then we do not know God. And that is true no matter how important we

say Christmas is to us, no matter how important we say the birth of Jesus is to us. Continually sinning and holding on to those sins shows that we don't understand why Jesus came at all.

And it's important to keep that in mind, Christians, as we examine our own lives. Because if we say that we should keep Christ in Christmas and that Jesus is the reason for the season and all those other wonderful things, but then we hate our brother, we've missed the point of Christmas altogether. If we put out a nativity set as big and as beautiful as we want to make it, but then we ignore our brother who is in need, we don't understand Christmas. And if we say Merry Christmas to everyone around us, but then persist in our sins, we don't understand why Jesus came. Jesus was born to take away sin, and in him there is no sin at all. And if we are in him, Christians, then we will not be in sin either.

But the second reason that John gives here is related to the first, and it's found in verses 7 and 8: "Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." So the Son of God appeared then, the Son of God was born in order to destroy the devil's works, in order to do away with evil. In other words, Jesus was born to judge. To judge the devil, to judge all evil. And his righteous judgment will condemn everything that has gone against God's will. And if we persist in our sins, Christians, then we are of the devil. And being like the devil, we will be condemned along with him. But if we do what is righteous, if we do what is right in the eyes of God, then we are of God, and then we will understand why Jesus was born.

So Christians, John shows us then the point of Christmas. Christmas is not about remembering the past. It's not remembering that historical event, as important as we might think it might be. Christmas is not about presents and trees. It's not about holly and mistletoe. It's not about snow or even Christmas music. Christmas is about the birth of Jesus. Jesus who has come to take away sin. Jesus who has come to destroy the works of the devil. Jesus who has come in order to make us holy, to make us righteous like him. Jesus was born so that we would love God and also love one another. And Jesus was born to make us the children of God, so that we would be like him forever.

So if we come to Christmas, then, and we leave it without any change in our hearts, without anything different from the way it was before, we haven't understood the point. But if we come to Christmas and from it we get a desire to be more like Jesus, to walk in his steps, to do what he has done, and if Christmas leads us to love him more and more, then we have understood the point of Christmas, the reason for the season. Jesus was born to set you free from sin, so that you would be like him forever.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us all things, but especially your Son, Jesus Christ, who became like us to redeem us. We pray that you would help us always to walk in his steps, so that we may be like him more and more. In his name we pray. Amen.