

Christians, the birth of Jesus isn't just something that happened a long time ago. John has told us already that Jesus was born to take away our sins. Jesus was born so that we would stop sinning. And Jesus was born in order to destroy the works of the devil. So the birth of Jesus is more than just history, more than just something that happened a long time ago. It is the very heart of what it means to be a Christian, the very reason why we are here today.

Do you recognize that truth? That we're here because Jesus has been born? In fact, John's point in our reading for today is that his birth is the whole reason why we have anything. It is the foundation of who we are, the foundation of the truth of God. Without the birth of Jesus, there is no Christianity. Without the birth of Jesus, there is no salvation. Without the birth of Jesus, there is no hope. That's how important it is to remember the birth of Christ and to consider what it means for us today.

But unfortunately, there are many who deny that, who say that Jesus wasn't really born in the flesh, that Jesus has not been born. Of course, there are unbelievers, atheists, Jews, anyone who are not of God. They're going to deny that Jesus has been born. But sadly, Christians, there are many to claim to be Christian who would say the same thing, who would deny that Jesus has been born. And just because they say that they are Christians doesn't mean that they are. Just because someone says that they believe the truth doesn't mean that they do. So how do we know? How do we know who is of God and who isn't? John gives us a test in our reading for this evening. Ask them a simple question: what do they think about the birth of Jesus? Or to put it a little different way: what does Christmas mean to them? Because the answer to that question, Christians, will help us to see the truth.

Because there were some in John's day--the ones that he's talking about--who denied that Jesus was ever human. Jesus never really became a man, they said. He only looked like he was a man. He only looked human. He was really just God in disguise. And the reason why they thought that was because they thought God could never become man. "God's perfect," they said, "and we're imperfect. So if God became one of us, he would become something less than God. He would become imperfect just like us." And that didn't make any sense to them. And so they said, "No, Jesus never really was human. Jesus never really was born in the flesh."

But if that was true, Christians, Jesus wasn't really human, then he's not really our Savior either. Because Jesus had to become one of us in order to save us. And if he never became one of us, then what hope do we have? We need him to become man so that we become forgiven. And so these people showed, then, by what they said that they were not really of God. Because they denied the birth of Christ, they showed that they did not believe in the truth.

In our day, unfortunately, there are many who deny that Jesus even existed, or at least deny that the Bible is reliable. They say that the Bible doesn't tell us the truth about who Jesus is. That it's all something that's just made up. That it's something the church invented for its own purposes, but we can't actually trust what it has to say. There are lots of atheists who believe that, of course, but there's also some who claim to be Christian who say the same thing. There's whole church bodies, major denominations, which deny that Jesus was born of a virgin. They deny that we can trust what the Bible says about the birth of Christ. And there's even some denominations where they have pastors who have come out very openly saying that they don't believe in God, and yet

they still are pastors within that church. It happens more often than you might think. But the problem is that they show by what they say, by their denial of the truth of God's Word, they show that they are not of truth.

Because if it's all made up, Christians, then what's the point of it all? The Gospel is not a message that's just meant to make us feel better about ourselves. The Gospel is not a message that is teaching us how to behave or even what kind of politics we should have. The Gospel is Jesus! And if we can't trust what the Bible says about Jesus, then there is no Gospel. And if there is no Gospel, there is no salvation. And if there is no salvation, then there is no hope. And we above all people are most to be pitied, because then we have nothing to look forward to. And so in this way, Christians, they show that they too are not of the truth, because they deny what the Bible has to say.

But probably the most dangerous of all, Christians, and the ones that we probably encounter the most, are those who say that they believe in the birth of Christ, who believe everything that the Bible says, and yet deny it by their actions. Deny it by what they do. Because they could say that Jesus has been born, but then show by their actions that they don't actually believe that it's true. Someone might say, for example, that Jesus is the reason for the season and make a very big deal out of it. But then they treat Christmas the way that the world treats Christmas: only about presents, only about spending, only about all of these other things, and not as a day to worship the Lord our God. There are some who will sing "Joy to the World" and all of those other wonderful Christian hymns. But then they'll turn around and hate their brother and show no mercy to their fellow Christian. There are those who will say that Jesus has been born, that he has come in the flesh, but then they won't help a brother in need and close their hearts against them. And in that way, Christians, they show by their actions that they don't actually believe that Jesus has been born.

Because the birth of Christ, Christians, transforms us. It changes us. We can't come to the birth of Jesus and walk away the same person. We are going to be something new. God and sinners have been reconciled, as the hymn goes. How, then, if Jesus has been born, can we continue walking in sin? How can we continue walking as if he had never been born? Because Jesus being born means that we are of God and not of the world. Jesus has been born so that we will love God, and we can also love one another. Jesus's birth changes everything.

So what we say about Christmas, Christians, says something about us. If we think of Christmas as only presents and only food, even only family--good as those things are--but only those things, we need to be careful. Because in that way, we can easily miss the point. The point of Christmas is to give thanks for the birth of Jesus Christ. The point of Christmas is to recognize that we are who we are today because Jesus has been born. The point of Christmas is to love and to care for one another, because Jesus, who took on our flesh, first loved and cared for us. So Christians, as we come to Christmas, let us keep its reason in mind. Jesus has been born so that we would belong to God and be new creations in him forever.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us all good things, especially your Son, Jesus Christ, who became like one of us to forgive us and redeem us. We pray that you would

help us always to follow after him, knowing that because he has been born, we have been reborn in him. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.