

The 'So What of Christmas'

It is wonderful to be with you this morning. Christmas is a significant time on the Christian calendar, as Christians we celebrate Christ being born and Christ with us.

What does God desire to birth in you and in me in the reality of living in South Africa at the end of 2023.

We are in a complex and messy place with the facts of corruption, load-shedding, an extreme gap between rich and poor and a struggling economy. We find ourselves in a situation where many people feel trapped, overwhelmed and lacking in hope.

But remember that Mary gave birth to Jesus in a time of huge political instability, where people were oppressed under Roman occupation. Circumstances were not ideal for giving birth. She was away from home and the support of her mother; there was no room at the inn, so they had to make do. Threatened by Herod, not long after the birth, she will have to flee with the young child to safety in Egypt.

There is nothing ideal or easy about our current situation is there? Yet Christ is our hope! And how do we experience His hope for ourselves and then share that hope, love, and peace that He brings with those who don't know Him in the days and weeks ahead?

It all starts with us, doesn't it? It starts with us encountering the true and living Christ for ourselves. **His Birth and Our New Birth ...**

Mat 1:23 "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him

Immanuel" --which means, "God with us."

HIS BIRTH IN HISTORY.

Luke 1:35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

Jesus Christ was born into this world, not from it. He did not emerge out of history; He came into history from the outside of it.

Jesus Christ is not the best human being the human race can boast of—He is a Being that the human race can take no credit for at all.

He is not man becoming God, but God Incarnate—God coming into human flesh from outside it. His life is the highest and the holiest entering through the most humble of doors.

Our Lord's birth was the appearance of God in human form.

His birth into the world made a way for HIS BIRTH IN ME.

Christ was born into history, but when we encounter Him, He also needs to be birthed in us! Just as our Jesus came into human history from outside it, He must also come into me from outside.

Paul writing the Galatians says to them and to us...

Gal 4:19 My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,

A question to consider in this moment: **Have I allowed my personal human life to become a "Bethlehem" for the Son of God?**

I cannot enter the realm of the kingdom of God unless I am born again from above by a birth nothing like my physical birth.

John 3:3;7 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.", "You must be born again"

This is not a command, but a fact based on the authority of God. Is there evidence of the new birth in my life? Have I given myself to the Lordship of Jesus so completely that "Christ is formed" in me.

Fr. Al Lauer, founder and long-time author of *One Bread, One Body*, said near the end of his life, "**The more I say 'No' to myself, the more I say 'Yes' to the Holy Spirit.**"

Today as we celebrate Christmas say "Yes" to the Lord and "No" to yourself... How do you do that?

Listen to Jesus words and refuse to look back!

Luke 9:62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

And as the **writer of Hebrews encourages** us, we (**Heb 3:1**). "Fix your eyes on Jesus"

And once "Christ is formed" in me, things begin to change, and His nature begins to work through me. God Evident in the Flesh. This is what is made so profoundly possible for you and for me through the redemption of man by Jesus Christ.

His Birth and Our New Birth, Immanuel, GOD WITH US!

You may be here this morning thinking but Andrew, I hear all this but do you know what is going on in my life, my finances, my marriage, my relationships. Do you realize what is going on and the depths of my pain and stress? This sounds nice but does it impact my reality?

Friends, no matter what is going on in your life, the answer is still Jesus. It's still Jesus because no matter what we may be going through, we know we are not alone.

We know that God can lift us up, and that God has lifted us up before. We know we can leave it all at the foot of the Cross, and so we can have peace even in the midst of chaos, and joy even in the midst of pain.

Is this even possible, who is this Jesus that is God with us?

Its Ok to have questions, even John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin had questions about Who Jesus was...

Mat 11:2-5 When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.

Since coming to faith last century, on a regular basis I have seen people healed, set free, the lame walk, cancer healed, deaf hear and the unchurched come to faith in Him. So yes He is the Son of God! He is Emmanuel, GOD WITH US!

He is the Messiah who is with us and brings healing to our own lives, but we need to be intentional about seeking Him out! This relationship with Jesus doesn't happen by osmosis!

We so often hear people say something along the lines of, "It just doesn't feel like Christmas." Or "I just don't feel Christmassy this year." The reality is that we must be

intentional about our relationship with Jesus. Are you reading the Bible, worshipping Jesus, praying?

There was a wealthy tax collector named Zacchaeus who was intentional about seeking Jesus out.

Luke 19:3-4 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

Think of the wealthiest person you know personally, have you got a picture of them in your mind. Could you imagine them running through a crowd and climbing up a tree in their fancy clothes to see a person? That's the picture here, we need to go after Jesus with that kind of abandon, not worrying about what other think.

We had the Soccer World Cup last year, and well done to Argentina for winning it. FIFA, an estimated *3.575 billion people* watched matches.

This year we had the Rugby World Cup and well done to the Boks for an amazing win! World Rugby estimates that almost a BILLION fans watched the spectacle. People went crazy, now why is it when I get excited about soccer or rugby I am a fan, but if I get the least bit excited about Jesus, I am a fanatic?

But you know what, I am a Jesus fanatic and fan, I am a Jesus junkie, and I am ok with that, because He is my ROCK, the one who is with me through the deepest valleys of my life! But I need to be intentional about that journey into His Presence!

Remember the prophet Isaiah's prophetic encouragement about Jesus to us?

Isa 35: 3-6;10, 40:31; (3) Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; (4) say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." (5) Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. (6) Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. (10) and the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Isaiah 40:31 "... those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

Anyone need the above?

If you are going through difficulties go after Jesus, don't care what others think, be a Jesus junkie!

His Birth and Our New Birth, Immanuel, GOD WITH US!

You may be questioning a difficulty that is taking place in your life at the moment. Could I encourage you to let Jesus displace the 'Why' in your life. Focus on Him and

(Eph 6:10 TPT) "...be supernaturally infused with strength through your life-union with the Lord Jesus. Stand victorious with the force of his explosive power flowing in and through you."

His Birth and Our New Birth, Immanuel, GOD WITH US!

God is with us, but this is not simply for us, but for our lives to be given over to Him, for us to engage with His mission into the world. Our new birth in Christ mean that we

no longer live for ourselves. There is a broken and hurting world out there that need to know Him.

Many people, even Christians, have been so brainwashed, manipulated, and overwhelmed by the consumerist hype of Christmas that they can't see the Christ of Christmas because of the crowd of obstructions.

Paul writing to the Galatians and us says...

Gal 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Paul is saying that because of this union with Christ we are able to live for Him. I am grateful for that because I know I could not live up to the truth of the Gospel or this life without Him. And part of living up to the truth of the Gospel is engaging with His mission into the world.

Col 1:27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

You and I are called to make Him known, to give a reason to the hurt, the lost, and the lonely why we have hope. That Christ in us is our hope! He is the hope of glory...

Remember the account of the paralyzed guy whose friends brought him to Jesus?

Luke 5:18-19 Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

Christ is in you and He is the hope to a hurting world. **Ask the Lord whom He wants you to carry to Christmas.** Pray for these people daily, repeatedly, for days.

After having talked to God about these people, talk to these people about God. Ask the Lord to give you the prophetic words that will remove the roof standing between them and Jesus.

After all this prayer and prophecy, lower them to Jesus. Jesus will say to them:

"My friend, your sins are forgiven you" (**Lk 5:20**).

By God's grace and by your faith, those you've been carrying may repent, receive forgiveness, and give their lives to Jesus. **Then we will have a real Christmas — new life and the birth of Jesus in our lives.**

Others may be so trapped that they need special help to see Jesus. Like the paralytic, they need four good friends who have enough love and faith to carry them to Jesus and even to disassemble the roof if necessary. Get some friends to pray with you...

Could it be that a source of joy and hope for people in distress could be ourselves in Jesus Christ. Could we help others see that they are loved? Could we help others hear an encouraging word?

Could we not only proclaim good news to the poor, but listen to them as their voices have been muted for so long because of the world's indifference?

Could the joy and hope we have in the birth of Jesus flow into seeking joy and hope for others?

May we rejoice in Jesus Christ and be ambassadors of hope in our world.

His Birth and Our New Birth, Immanuel, GOD WITH US!

THIS CHRISTMAS:

- Have I allowed my personal human life to become a “Bethlehem” for the Son of God?
- "The more I say ‘No’ to myself, the more I say ‘Yes’ to the Holy Spirit."
- Let Jesus displace the ‘Why’ in your life
- Christ is in you and He is the hope to a hurting world. Ask the Lord whom He wants you to carry to Christmas