

"The Consequences of Christmas"

Text: Deuteronomy 18:15-19

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ – whose birth we this day celebrate. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Did you get exactly what you wanted for Christmas? If so, you'll want to remember the old saying: *"Be careful what you wish for."* Bad grammar aside, I'm guessing the saying probably rings true for most or all of you – and not just in connection with Christmas presents. Jobs, boyfriends, girlfriends, money, house, car, boat, motorcycle, fame – I suspect that at least every *adult* here this morning has, at some point in your life, longed for what was actually very *bad* for you. Some of these things were denied us; some were granted, probably to teach us a lesson. *"All that glitters is not gold"* is more than just a line by Shakespeare in the Merchant of Venice.

Every single human being has dreams. Every single human being has yearnings and desires. You do, I do. Yet when those yearnings or desires are realized, what human beings invariably discover is that every path that they chose led them somewhere, often where they never envisioned going. Those that achieve a dream universally find that every blessing, every gift or success, every victory, carried consequences. In fact the realization of any dream is seldom the end. It is usually just the beginning of a whole new set of demands and responsibilities. Consider that fact for a moment as you hear our text for this Christmas morning, recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy, the 18th Chapter:

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 18:15-19** *"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers--it is to him you shall listen--¹⁶ just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.'¹⁷ And the LORD said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken.¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.¹⁹ And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.*

This is God's Word. On this day of giving we marvel at just how tremendous a gift God's Word truly is, the value of which has no measure. That you and I here this morning might be granted a God-pleasing

reverence for these words, and that each one of us might be instructed and strengthened by them on this special occasion, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

The older you are, the more you can probably relate to the fact that realizing dreams or attaining goals always brings consequences and responsibilities. Realizing or achieving dreams can be both the good news and the bad news. In some cases this is easy to recognize; as, for example, when individuals with no self-control win the lottery. Those who imagine that money is the solution to most, if not all, of their problems seldom stop to consider that the fulfillment of that particular dream will without question make their life infinitely more complicated and difficult. Almost without exception their "dream-come-true" creates a whole world of temptation and responsibility that just makes what they thought was a bad situation immeasurably worse.

In a way it's sort of like growing up. The older, bigger, and stronger you get, the more you can control or manipulate your environment – the greater your power to make things happen. The more power or control that you gain, the more responsibility you need to demonstrate.

You may have heard this before, but it bears repeating in this context. *Who is the most self-centered, inconsiderate, demanding, ego-centric person you have ever known?* The answer is you, as a newborn. When you were first born, you could do almost nothing. Good thing, since you were concerned with absolutely nothing but yourself. As you grew and learned to open doors and put things in your mouth, your parents had to start teaching you things like self-control, self-denial, and empathy (concern for others.) Some of these things were fairly basic, like the fact that not everything belongs in your mouth and kitties do not like to be ridden bareback. (Nor, for that matter, do kitties like to be saddled and ridden.) Your parents had to teach you to say no to yourself. Once you're all grown up you have the power to do pretty much anything you want. Yet along the way you needed to learn that the greater your power and the greater your empire or sphere of influence, the greater your responsibility and the greater the consequences connected with your actions.

Take a quick run through the average human life and you'll see what we're talking about here. When you are little you can't wait to go to school. Once you get to school, you need to have learned not to stick your finger in the other little boy's eye just because you think he took your crayons. Mess up, and mom and dad get called in. On life goes. As you get older you just can't wait until junior high, and then you

dream about high school. After that, college or the working world. At that point, poking someone else in the eye to get what you want is called assault. Mess up there, and the police get involved. With each step, the responsibilities increase and the punishment for mistakes grows ever more serious. With the blessings of marriage come greater influences and even more responsibilities. Add a child and suddenly you find that God holds you responsible for another human soul. More wealth, more influence, more power - all mean even more colossal consequences for failure and abuse.

So what is the ultimate? What is the height, the pinnacle, the zenith of importance and consequence? Where is it that the significance of your decisions or actions is at its absolute maximum?

This is where our text comes in; because it is there that we find the ultimate in consequence. In our text we read one of the early prophecies of the Savior, whose birth we today celebrate. The occasion for this prophecy was the request the Children of Israel made at Mt. Sinai (or Mt. Horeb as it is called in our text). It was there that the voice of their God absolutely terrified the Jews. It caused them to fear for their very lives. They begged God for a mediator, one who would act as a go-between so that they would not have to endure the terror they felt at what was arguably rather close and direct contact with their God. God's reply was something along the lines of, *"I intend to do just that."* His solution was to send Jesus Christ as both our Mediator and our Savior.

But just what does that promise have to do with achieving a goal or realizing a dream and the consequences of such things? In our text, God revealed to his people not only that they were going to get their wish (because he was going to send that Mediator for which they had asked) he also made clear that the arrival of that Savior would carry with it profound *consequences*. To this end God in our text not only said, ***"I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him..."*** he also added the consequence of realizing that desire: ***"And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him."***

Decade after decade passed after God made that promise at Mt. Sinai. Generation after generation came and went. The promise of the Savior was carried forward. For centuries God's faithful people looked forward to the advent of the Savior. Generation after generation yearned for that great event. The prophecies of old were memorized and repeated over and over again. Though generation after generation came and went, the

promise of a Messiah remained, and the yearning for that ultimate goal continued.

This was *the* goal, the *ultimate objective* for God's people since that first promise in the Garden of Eden. This was the dream shared down through the ages by all believers - by king and by carpenter, by scholar and by slave. Always they looked forward to that great day when the Promised Messiah would appear. What apparently never occurred to them is the fact that, as with any dream, with the realization of *this* dream, *this* promise, came consequences unlike any other in all creation.

Do you imagine, for example, that all those souls who looked for the fulfillment of the ancient promise ever stopped to consider the profound significance of the fulfillment of that promise? It probably never crossed their mind that there could possibly be any sort of *negative* connected with the sending of the Messiah. Yet God in our text clearly warned that with the coming of *the* Mediator came also the potential to *reject the words or message of that Mediator*. Again, in the words of our text, ***"And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him."***

The fact is once Jesus Christ was born, the clear and distinct dividing line between heaven and hell was permanently and indelibly drawn. In ancient times, for example, Isaac and Ishmael shared the same father, Abraham. Both could and would have been saved through faith in the promise of the Savior. Yet with the coming of Jesus Christ, that razor-sharp line has been drawn. From that point in history on, we are no longer saved through faith in the *promise* of a Savior; we are saved through faith in a *very specific Savior*, Jesus Christ. Therefore with the realization of mankind's greatest dream came the ultimate consequence, for to reject Jesus Christ as that one and only Savior is to reject eternal life itself. Jesus himself clearly taught this pivotal truth when he said, ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*** (John 14:6)

All this means that from the first Christmas Day onward "the Promise" has a name, an identity. The Promised Savior is no longer nameless and faceless; it is Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ *alone*. That means, in part, that mankind could no longer fit that promise into his own idea of what the fulfillment of that promise would look like - what exactly that Promised One would do or what he would come to accomplish. God himself defined all of that by sending Jesus. No one therefore that rejects *Jesus Christ* can lay claim to the title of "believer." No one can

reject Jesus and still claim to be a "Child of God," for to reject Jesus is to reject God. It is the very definition of unbelief. In Luke 10:16 Jesus himself said: ***"He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me."***

For the most part, mankind has no idea, no concept of the profound consequences connected to the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. They have no concept that that sweet little figurine in the manger of their nativity set represents both life and death. To those who believe in him, he is Lord and Savior. He is life itself. To those who reject him and his sin payment, that same Jesus is "foolishness" and an offense. To those who reject, Jesus is death. Paul described it this way in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16: ***"Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. ¹⁵ For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. ¹⁶ To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life."***

Christmas then takes on a certain sobriety, doesn't it? The coming of that tiny little baby in the manger in Bethlehem changed everything. He is, in his very person, the single, lone path to heaven. Jesus died to pay for your sins, but unbelief – rejection of Jesus Christ as your Savior – brings eternal condemnation. Either you trust Jesus to have paid the blood-debt owed by you because of your sins, or God's wrath will one day be visited upon you. Using the message of our text, either you listen to and believe the words of Jesus Christ and live, or reject them and face the eternal wrath of a holy God.

Obviously this eternal threat of the law is intended to strike terror in the hearts of those who reject Jesus Christ. Not so with you. On the contrary, God the Holy Spirit has worked saving faith in your heart. The result is that you see the Christ Child with the eyes of wisdom and understanding, and above all with the eyes of pure and holy faith and trust. Our great joy on this Christmas morning is therefore knowing that we are on the right side of Jesus, the Messiah, who is the dividing line. You can know with certainty that the coming of the Savior brought with it a profound consequence, but that that consequence for you is only peace, comfort, and the assurance of the *fact* that your sin-debt has been paid, and that you are therefore an heir of eternal life. God preserve us in this faith, until he comes again. Amen.

The Pre-Sermon Hymn -105 (*Stanzas 1-3, 6-8*) (*Red Hymnal*)
"Praise God the Lord, Ye Sons of Men"

The Sermon – Text: Deuteronomy 18:15-19

"The Consequences of Christmas"

The Post-Sermon Hymn -705 (*Brown Hymnal*)
"Come, O Long-Expected Jesus"

The Prayers followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -91 (*Stanzas 1-2, 4-5 & 9*) (*Red Hymnal*)
"Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this Christmas morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!
St. Paul Lutheran Church is a member congregation of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative synod with congregations throughout the United States and missions and affiliates around the world. If you are visiting from another city, please ask the pastor for the name of a CLC church near you.

Announcements:

Christmas Flowers – If you purchased one of the poinsettias with which the church has been decorated again this Christmas season, please feel free to take your plant(s) home with you after the service this morning, or consider gifting them to someone who might enjoy them.

Schedule – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to be out of town visiting family this week. There is therefore no Confirmation class or Midweek Bible study scheduled for this Wednesday, December 27th. Both are scheduled to resume on January 3rd. It is our intention to follow the regular schedule next Sunday, December 31st, including Bible Class and Sunday School at 9am and Sunday Worship at 10am.



St Paul Lutheran Church
Bismarck, ND

Christmas Day Service
2023



ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor

Christmas Day Service – December 25, 2023

Pre-Service Music

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn -87 (*Stanza 1*) (*Red Hymnal*)
"Joy to the World"

Scripture Reading by the Pastor

(*Isaiah 9:2, 6-7*) The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined...⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

The Response Sung by the Congregation – (Hymn 79)

Rejoice, rejoice this happy morn, a Savior unto us is born,
The Christ the Lord of Glory.
His lowly birth in Bethlehem the angels from on high proclaim
And sing redemption's story.
My soul, extol God's great favor, bless Him ever for salvation.
Give Him praise and adoration.

Call to Repentance by the Pastor

On this great day we lift our hearts and voices in thanksgiving to our God. Yet our joy on this occasion is also mixed with sobriety, for we recognize that it was our sin that brought Jesus to earth, where He paid the penalty that we deserved. It is fitting and right therefore that we humbly confess our sins to our God on this morning when we celebrate the birth of the One who came to pay for those sins.

The Confession of Sins (*Sung to "Oh Come Oh Come Emmanuel"*)

1. Alas, my God, my sins are great, my conscience doth upbraid me;
And now I find that in my strait, no man hath power to aid me.
Forgive me Lord; turn not my soul away; for Jesus died to save me.

2. And fled I hence in my despair, in some lone spot to hide me,
My griefs would still be with me there, and peace still be denied me.
Forgive me Lord; turn not my soul away; for Jesus died to save me.
3. Lord, Thee I seek, I merit naught; yet pity and restore me.
Just God, be not Thy wrath my lot; Thy Son hath suffered for me.
Forgive me Lord; turn not my soul away; for Jesus died to save me.

Absolution (*Announced by the Pastor*)

Response (*Sung to the tune of 708 "Oh Come All Ye Faithful"*)

The Lord God be with us, and with all His children
Oh come let us lift our spirits unto the Lord
With hearts rejoicing, thanks to Him we render
With joy we come before Him, in gratefulness implore Him
With thankful hearts adore Him, Christ the Lord!

The Collect for the Day (*Read by the Pastor*)

Grant, Almighty God, that the birth of Your only-begotten Son in human flesh may bring true joy to our hearts – we who through sin were held in the bondage of darkness and despair. This we ask through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

The Scripture Lessons:

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 52:7-10) Our first reading tells of not only the waiting for the event we celebrate this morning, but the pure joy at its fulfillment. The Lord has indeed comforted his people by sending into our world his Son, our Savior.

The New Testament Lesson: (Philippians 2:5-11) Our New Testament reading gives us a special insight into the compassionate heart of our Savior, and a deeper appreciation for the loving humility he demonstrated by entering our world. Mankind can never fully appreciate the divine humility of Jesus, who left the perfection of heaven to rescue fallen mankind.

The Confession of Faith – (The Christmas Creed)

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Who sent His Son to become my Savior;

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, my Lord, the long-promised Messiah, Who came as foretold, being conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, announced by the angels, worshipped by the shepherds, adored by the Wise Men, Who lived to suffer, die, and rise again, To free me from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil;

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, Who has brought me to faith in my Savior, And by whose continuous work in my heart, I rejoice in my salvation, Walk in Christ, Show forth His praises, And will one day live and reign with Him eternally. Amen.