

Christmas Eve 2023

"Why?"

Text: John 3:14-21

Dear Fellow Christians – redeemed sinners who consider it their greatest honor to bear the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ:

The ramifications of what we celebrate at Christmas are indeed profound. Who can even fully understand the concept of God-made-man? Yet the basic story or message of Christmas itself is quite simple – so simple that our children can tell us what happened, as they have this evening. That's also why our goal on this night is not to "put on a show" or to present a "Christmas pageant." It is to simply focus on the reason for our celebration in the most humble and unpretentious manner possible.

Our children help us to remember this basic tenet or goal, for they themselves are the sort of Christians our Savior told us to emulate. From their simple, uncluttered hearts they ask simple questions and seek simple answers – even when none are available. That's why one of their favorite questions is "Why?" – "Why is the sky blue... the grass green... and why is the square of the hypotenuse of every right triangle equal to the sum of the square of each of its sides?" Okay, maybe not this last, but you get the picture. Every adult that has been around children for any length of time knows to expect a regular procession of "Why's?"

So also this evening we seek to adopt such simplicity in our celebration of the Savior's birth by asking that same question: "Why? Why did Jesus come to this earth?"

The question, though simple, can yield remarkable insights. It can also serve to center and focus us at a time when our thoughts can be so easily distracted.

That section of God's Word that will answer our simple question this evening with God's divine truth is that familiar section from John's Gospel, that very special Third Chapter:

ESV John 3:14-21 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his

Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God.

This is God's Word – the words of the One whose birth we celebrate. We therefore ask our God to visit our hearts and instruct us through these his words as we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!**" Amen.

I actually loved the "why?" questions when my children were little. Not so much now, because now they can tell when I'm just messing with them or making stuff up. They have successfully taken all the fun out of the exercise. Though my kids might have a different recollection (don't believe them) I actually did try to answer their "why?" questions honestly. I loved the questions, in part, because they forced me to think about things I wouldn't otherwise consider. We look for that same outcome this evening as we struggle to answer the simple question: "Why did Jesus come to earth?"

The first answer, based on our text, seems pretty straightforward: "**God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...**" He did it out of love, that much is clear, but it gets a bit more difficult when we try both to define that love together with the object or recipient of that love. What exactly, in other words, does it mean that "**God loved the world**"? Obviously we know that he wasn't romantically attached to us, but did he do it because he "liked" us? Admired us? Felt obligated or responsible somehow?

The original word used here for "love" is actually the same word God used when he told husbands to love their wives, and the same word he used when he told Christians to love their enemies. The basic idea of this sort of love is "a kind and selfless consideration of the needs of others." Some have described it as "outward directed" or "purposeful." It refers to a contemplation of the needs of another person and then placing that person's needs above your own. The direction arrow of this sort of love is not pointed inward (at your own feelings, needs, or

desires) but outward. It calls for sacrificing the feelings, needs, and desires of self for the good of someone else.

That means that God sent his Son not because he felt obligated, experienced any sort of emotion-based affection or bond, and certainly not because he thought we had earned that sort of sacrifice from our holy God. He did it simply because *he recognized that we needed it*. He recognized that there was no other way for us to escape eternal judgment and condemnation for our sins, and he determined to supply *for us* what we could not provide *for ourselves*. The sacrificial nature of God's love is actually quite astounding when you stop to consider it. He saw what we needed and simply determined to supply that need at an unfathomable cost to himself.

Our text also answers our "Why?" not only by revealing to us the "why" of God's special love for us, but by telling why *not*. In the words of our text: **"God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world."** Before you dismiss that simple truth, give it some thought. This was in fact an option open to God, wasn't it? He could have sent his Son to live a perfect, holy, sinless life just to quiet any possible objection on Judgment Day. Jesus' perfect life would have forever silenced every human objection that what God had demanded of us was simply not possible – the notion that no one could ever keep God's commandments perfectly. God could have sent his Son just to answer or silence that claim; just so that he could then point to his Son and reply simply: *"He did."* In other words, God could have sent his Son just to prove to mankind that what he had demanded of us *was* in fact possible, that there was nothing unreasonable or unbearable in connection with his original demand of perfect obedience. The plan wasn't flawed; mankind failed the plan, and thereby failed God and ruined all.

But that, according to our text, is not why God sent his Son. Our text assures us he didn't send his Son just so that he could fairly and reasonably condemn the world. That wouldn't have been love, would it? Justice maybe, but not love.

So what then is our answer to that most basic question *"Why?"* It is that God did everything right when he created us, but we did everything wrong when we sinned. God then went above and beyond "fair" when he sent Jesus to our earth as our brother. Though he certainly was under no obligation to do so, he gave of himself to supply what each of us desperately needed, but could not supply for ourselves: the full and complete payment for our sins.

The answer also defines our goal as Christians. We now seek to thank and honor our God for what he did for us not by trying to pay for our own sins with our own good works. That is, in fact, the ultimate disrespect for what Jesus did for us. The fact that God in love sent his Son ought to teach us that earning our own salvation was and is simply not possible. God would not have sent his Son had there been another way. Therefore the best way to thank and honor our God is to acknowledge the great sacrifice he made, to accept what he told us as true (that we have been declared "not guilty" and therefore righteous because Jesus paid the entire debt for our sins) and to share with others that best of all news, the news which includes also everyone with whom we come in contact. Jesus entered our world to pay for their sins too.

God the Holy Spirit fill our hearts with comfort and joy in understanding the answer to that simple question "Why?" Jesus came to our earth not to condemn us but to save us. Simply because he loves us, and knew that we could not save ourselves. Is not this a wonder. Amen.

- Announcements -

Welcome – We warmly welcome all, especially any guests with us this evening. We consider it a great privilege to share God's Word with you—especially the gospel message of the birth of Jesus Christ, our Savior, as retold also this evening by our children. Please record your visit in our guest book and join us again for our Christmas Day Service tomorrow morning at 10 am.

Christmas Gift Bags – As is our custom, gift bags have again been prepared for the children in attendance this evening. Please feel free to take a bag with you for each of your children as you leave the church this evening.



St Paul Lutheran Church
Christmas Eve 2023

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Mick Johnson, President Today's Organist: Suzannah Miller
Michael Roehl, Pastor

Christmas Eve – December 24, 2023

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

Hymn 712 - "What Child Is This" *(Brown Hymnal)*

Service of the Word *(Brown Hymnal page 22)*

The Scripture Reading: John 1:1-14 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Confession of Faith - (The Christmas Creed)

***I believe in God the Father Almighty, Who created me
And Who sent His Son to be 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 in all eternity.
Amen.***

Hymn 713 - "Your Little Ones, Dear Lord, Are We" *(Brown Hymnal)*

Our Children Tell the Christmas Story

Luke 1:26 - Luke 2:17 *(Recited by our children)*

Hymns by the Children – "O Little Town of Bethlehem"
"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

Hymn 706 - "Go Tell It on the Mountain" *(Brown Hymnal)*

Sermon by the Pastor

Text: John 3:14-21 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." ¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God.

Sermon Title: "Why?"

Hymn 710 - "Once in Royal David's City" *(Brown Hymnal)*

The Prayers

The Benediction

Closing Hymn – 646 "Silent Night" *(Red Hymnal)*

Silent Prayer