

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, December 19, 2010 – 11:00 AM
Rev. Steve Skates, pastor

The Reason for the Season – Matthew 1:18-21

Introduction: Here we are on the last Sunday before Christmas, and even though it's not politically correct to say it anymore, I want to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas! I hope all your Christmas dreams come true.

By now, I hope you've got all your Christmas plans in order and most things done, but just in case, I've come up with a 10 point Christmas checklist. Get your pens and paper out because you'll want to check these things off as you get them done.

1. Have you made your Christmas list? Are you getting your kids that special gift that everybody's getting – the one that's latest and greatest hottest gadget that no kid can live without? What about that special gift for that special someone? You know, that gift that if you get it for them, will they like you more? Oh yeah, make sure it's the right size, shape, and color! And don't forget the batteries! And for heaven's sake, make sure it doesn't come with some assembly required!

2. Have you got all the stocking stuffers?

3. Have you got everything wrapped and put under the tree?

4. Have you made the Christmas candy, the Christmas cookies, the Christmas cakes, the Christmas pies, and the Christmas dinner plans? What about the Gingerbread house, and the handmade ornaments? Have you got those done yet?

5. Have you had your kids and grandkids' pictures made with Santa yet? You know, there's no more thrilling experience than taking your kids kicking and screaming all the way to the North Pole in a mall somewhere and making them sit in Santa's lap! And the best part is they GIVE you a Polaroid of your child in tears...all for about 40 bucks! Now that's money well spent isn't it? That'll make a nice coaster some day.

6. What about the Christmas cards...have you sent them all out yet? You better check, 'cause you don't want to leave anyone out – especially if they sent you one!

7. What about the decorations? Is the tree and the lights up? Have you hung the wreaths and the bows and the garland up? Are all the yard trees decorated and have you put up the fake deer? Are all the candles up? Is the Nativity set up? Is the mistletoe up? Is your blood pressure up?

8. Have you listened to the Nutcracker? Have you seen "A Charley Brown Christmas," "Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer," and "Frosty the Snowman?" Have you watched "Miracle on 34th Street," and "It's a Wonderful Life" and "White Christmas" for the 50th time?

9. Have you got your Christmas wardrobe ready? You know, the red and green sweaters, the snowman and Thomas Kinkead sweatshirts, and the Santa cap or the reindeer antler headpiece?

10. Have you made it to all the Christmas parties and dinners? Have you had enough of the turkey and dressing, cranberry sauce, ham, sweet potato soufflé? Have you gained 10 lbs. yet? Have you gained anything at all b doing all of this?

Am I close to covering everything? Am I even asking the right questions...the right Christmas questions? Are all these things really what Christmas is all about? Is Christmas real? Or is it really just a make-believe, get-me-what-I-want, Santa Clausy, snowy winter wonderland? What is Christmas about? Better yet, WHO is Christmas all about?

And the answer is really simple. Want to know what it is? I know you do...but unfortunately we're not ready to hear it because we're too hung up on waiting for Santa Claus to come down the chimney. We even set out cookies for him.

I said all of that because we need to know the truth about Christmas. We need to understand how we got where we are today. We need to know that from the time the New Testament was being written until around 350 AD, the commonly held date of Jesus' birthday of January 6. But then, it was changed to the currently recognized date of December 25. And ever since, the celebration of Jesus' birthday began to change.

You see, as Christianity began to grow and flourish around the world, people began to add their cultural traditions to the holiday. For example, the Middle Ages were when the first Christmas Carols began to be

written and sung. Later, the Celtic culture added their symbols of mistletoe and holly, while the Italians, primarily, St. Francis of Assisi, came up with the idea of portraying all the characters in the Christmas story in one scene, called the Nativity. Then things really started to change as the star in the east gave way to a star-topped Christmas tree, and sheep and shepherds gave way to flying reindeer, and the wise men gave way to a jolly old benevolent man called Saint Nicholas, who later evolved into the personification we now called Santa Claus.

And we're no different. Today, our kids are being taught that it's not Christmas we celebrate, it's a winter festival. And we don't sing about the baby Jesus, but rather about Frosty the Snowman, adorned with jingle bells, riding in a sleigh while living in a winter wonderland. No wonder so many people forget, or don't even know the real reason the holiday exists.

Today, if you ask people what the reason for the Christmas season is, you'll get answers, ranging from; "*Santa Claus*" to "*a special time for the kids*"; to "*a time to give and receive gifts*"; to "*a time for family*."

Maybe, if you look hard enough, you'll find some who will sheepishly say that Jesus is the reason for the season. You see that statement in a lot of places – on coffee cups, bumper stickers, T-shirts, and billboards; but is that even a true statement? Is saying that Jesus is the reason for the season enough, or could there be a deeper reason why we should celebrate the birth of Jesus during this season?

This morning, I want us to try to suppress the madness I've mentioned before and focus on the real meaning of Christmas. Let's stop and think about why we should celebrate Christmas.

To do that, let's hear from the man Himself. Let's look at a few statements that Jesus made in the Gospels to see if we can determine from Jesus' own lips, why He came into the world.

1. Jesus Came to Fulfill the Law. Matthew 5:17

Jesus said, "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them.*" **Matthew 5:17 (NIV)**

Now why did Jesus have to come to fulfill the Law, and why would the Law need to be fulfilled? To answer this question, we have to understand the purpose of the Law. The Law was given to lead a person to know God, and to know His standards of righteous behavior. But it didn't take people long to find out that they couldn't follow God's law perfectly. Man was too full of self and sin, and God was too holy. So, the ultimate purpose of the law then, was to let people know that they could not get to heaven on their own. And that is where Jesus comes in.

In **Galatians 3:24 (NIV)** we read where Paul says, "*...the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.*" So when Jesus came, claiming to be the Son of God, He met every one of God's standards as spelled out in the Law. Jesus' sinless life and radical teachings revealed Him as the fulfillment of God's Law, because it was to be completed or fulfilled by His life, death and resurrection.

Now this is important because without Jesus fulfilling the Law, and dying the death He did, there would be no salvation by grace. Without the blood of Jesus, there would be no true forgiveness of sins.

Hebrews 10:1-4 (NIV) says, "*The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*"

The writer of Hebrews tells us in chapter 9 that by Jesus' sacrifice and shed blood on the cross of Calvary, He became the ultimate sacrifice – the once-and-for-all-time sacrifice who purchased our forgiveness and our salvation.

As we read these passages and hear what Jesus said He came into this world to do, do you see or hear anything about Jesus' coming that would make us want to do any of those 10 things on our checklist? Hold that answer because we need to look at something else Jesus said about why He came into the world.

2. Jesus Came to Divide Men. Luke 12:51-53

In **Luke 12:51-52 (NIV)** Jesus says, "*Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three.*"

Jesus said in **Matthew 10:34-36 (NIV)**, *“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law--a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.’”*

Now, there are some things in the Bible, if we'd all be honest, we wish wasn't in there, and this is one for me. I don't like it when Jesus says that He came to turn family members against each other. It just doesn't jive with the Jesus I know. My Jesus doesn't make war, and divide people against each other, does He? But listen, if we really understand what Jesus is saying here, it becomes very clear what Jesus said He came to do. He really came to show us how different living in His kingdom is from the world's idea of living. It is so different, so contrasting; it will literally divide mothers and dads, and sisters and brothers, because people will have to choose which way they will follow.

You see, there are only two sides you can choose to be on. You are either on God's side as you choose to give your life to Christ and serve Him, or you're on Satan's side and against God by simply choosing to do nothing, or refusing to accept Christ.

In **Matthew 12:30 (NIV)** Jesus states, *“He who is not with me is against me.”* So that's why Jesus said in **John 9:39 (NIV)**, *“For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”*

Now look again, as we read these statements from Jesus about His purpose in coming to the world, do you see anything here about Him coming so we can put out cookies and milk for Santa Claus? Do you see anything about gathering around a family dinner table eating turkey and cranberry sauce?

Now hold on! Don't write me off as Ebenezer Scrooge just yet! We're actually getting closer to the real reason for the season. Why did Jesus come into the world? Let's look at another statement of Jesus.

3. Jesus Came to Serve Others. Matthew 20:28

In **Matthew 20:28 (NIV)** Jesus said, *“Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* Now this is more in line with the spirit of the season isn't it? I mean, Santa comes to give and do things for others doesn't he? So maybe the reason for the season is service.

I think it's interesting that Jesus said this in the context of James and John asking Jesus if they could be His right hand men in the kingdom. They were talking about leadership and prominence, but He was talking about service and humility.

Jesus was saying that God sent Him into the world to serve HIS creation. That's amazing when you think about it, because just who is Jesus here to serve? He came to serve us.

But, again, we don't see anything here about sleigh bells or reindeer. Instead, we see that a reason for the season is service. Now, as I said, this is sounding better, but I still don't think we have really found the real reason for the season yet. Let's look at another statement Jesus made about why He came into the world.

4. Jesus Came to Seek and Save the Lost. Luke 19:10

Jesus had just spent some time at the house of Zaccheus, who was a known cheat and thief, he was a tax collector. The religious leaders were shocked that Jesus would take the time to eat in the house of a sinner, Jesus knowing their hearts gives us this response found in **Luke 19:10 (NIV)**: *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”*

So, just who are these lost people that Jesus came to seek, and what caused them to be lost?

Well, in **Matthew 9:12-13 (NIV)** Jesus said, *“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”*

The “lost” whom Jesus came to seek are the sinners. And the sinner is anyone who commits sin. And sin is literally missing the mark of God's perfect and holy standards. Sin is either doing what God has told us not to do, or not doing what God tells us to do.

The Bible tells us that sin separates from God; sin puts us at war with God. So, that is why Jesus came seeking those who separated from God to reconcile our differences and put us in a right relationship with God so we could live with Him in heaven for eternity. How does that happen, you ask?

Well, listen to this verse because it tells us how peace can be made with God: **Romans 5:1-2 (NIV)** says, *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”

Jesus came to pay the price for our sin - to pay a debt that we could never pay on our own, so that we would have a chance to be a part of God’s kingdom. He came so that we could one day stand before God knowing that heaven will be our home. But He also came that we might live life to the fullest in the present.

You see, that sin I was talking about earlier; it makes us its slave. Jesus said in **John 8:34 (NIV)**, *“I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”* Jesus said that came to set those who are being held captive by sin free.

As Jesus began His earthly ministry, He stood up in the synagogue and read this from the Prophet Isaiah, *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed.”* **Luke 4:18 (NIV)**. He was talking about Himself!

When we let sin have its way in our lives, we’re the poor. We are sin’s prisoners. We’re the blind and the oppressed. That is why Jesus said in **John 10:10a (NIV)** that *“The thief (satan) comes only to steal, kill, and destroy.”* That’s what sin will do to you. It will steal your freedom. It will kill your influence and reputation. And ultimately, it will destroy you.

But Jesus went on to say in that same verse, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”* Jesus, God’s Son, came to set us free from sin’s stronghold on us. And *“...if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”* **John 8:36 (NIV)**.

Look at it this way...One Christmas, when our boys were little, we got them some really nice and rather expensive toys. I also brought home a display stand from the grocery store where I worked. It was a cardboard Kraft Jet Puffed Marshmallow display stand that looked like a jet. It was going to be thrown away, so they just let me have it. Well, what do you think they played with the most? You’re right – the cardboard jet!

Well, what the world has to offer us is like that cardboard jet. It’s not real life. But so many times, we settle for the cardboard and call it life. We’d rather play around with the cheap cardboard box than the expensive gift. Remember...the world offers you the box; but Jesus offers you the gift of life!

Satan wants your life and soul. He wants us to forget about the real reason we celebrate Christmas. He wants us to forget about why Jesus was born in a manger and why He suffered and died on the cross. Why did Jesus come into the world?

5. Jesus Came Because We are the Reason for the Season.

Jesus came to give us life and hope. Without sin, there would be no reason for Jesus to come. We are the reason for the season.

That should humble us, and serve as a reminder of the love that God has for us that He would send His Son to redeem us from the curse of sin. So the season is really all about sin and the devastating effect it has on mankind. The season is about a God who loved us so much He sent His Son to die in our place. The season is about the love that the Father and the Son has for us. The season is about family, but it’s more about the family of God. The season is about gifts, but specifically, it’s about the gift of salvation God offers us through His Son Jesus!

Conclusion: When you open your gifts this year, remember the gift that Jesus came to give - the gift of salvation. When you look at your decorated Christmas tree, let it remind you of the cross and how it was decorated with the scarred and beaten lifeless body of Jesus and how He allowed Himself to be put there to pay for our sins.

What is the reason for the season? The reason for the season is sin. The Reason for the season is Jesus coming to redeem sinners. The reason for the season is celebrating the greatest gift that God could give to mankind.

Will you accept it? Will you take Jesus up on His offer of salvation?