

Sermon: “Getting what you really need.”

If you're paying attention, I may have made you ask yourself a question – why are we talking about John the Baptist on the Sunday before Christmas Eve? Instead of answering I'm going to ask you a question: What is it about Christ that gives us hope? What is it about Christ that gives this joy and deep sadness? What is it about Christ that provides comfort in loneliness? What is it about Christ that gives peace in fear?

The answer begins back in John – the Pharisees who were questioning John – asked him if he were the Messiah, Elijah, or the Prophet. That's what they thought they needed – a rescuer, a person with power, a deliverer to overcome the Romans.

What they really needed was Jesus. If we look to the first two chapters of Matthew, the birth of the Son of God, we see four titles given to Christ, each of which gives us insight into why He was so sufficient for us and the only real power in Christmas?

²⁰But after Joseph had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,^(f) because he will save his people from their sins.” ²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”^(g) (which means “God with us”).

²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

^{2:1}After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi^(a) from the east came to Jerusalem ²and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

³When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.

The four titles? 1:21, He is called Jesus. 1:23, He is called Immanuel. 2:2, He is called King. 2:4 Christ. All of those titles for that one little child: Jesus, Immanuel, King, Christ. Jesus, Immanuel, King, Christ.

Jesus – “because it is He who will save His people from their sins.” Jesus, He gives salvation to His people. He saves them from their sins. It is used over 700 times in the New Testament. It is a form of the Hebrew word Yeshua (Joshua), Yeshua, Jehoshua. It means “God, will save.”

Immanuel – Matthew 1:23 ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel,’ which translated means, ‘God with us.’” He is not only Jesus, He is Immanuel. And to see that at this time of year is to see a great reality. By the way, verse 23 is a quote from the Old Testament. It is taken from Isaiah 7:14. In Isaiah God is saying, “Look, no one will be allowed to destroy the people of God and no one will be allowed to destroy David's royal line.”

Third title. When the wise men arrived and confronted Herod, they said, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?" Here He is introduced as King. He came not only to save His people from their sins, He came not only to sympathize and succor and help His people, but He came to rule the world.

4th Title: The Bible says that "he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born." The Christ is just a term that means the Messiah, the anointed. Messiah, Christ, same thing. One from Hebrew, one from Greek. It means the anointed one, God's special anointed one. And it reflects His right to rule, His right to have authority and sovereignty as the promised Messiah of God.

What is this saying to us? Listen. At Christmas when you see the Child, see who He is – savior, king, the one anointed, Immanuel, God with us. He was under great pressure to be all those things, but at the same time – being born where he was, when he was, to whom he was born – he came as one of us. He was hungry. He was thirsty. He was tired. He slept. He learned. He was glad. He was sad. He was angry. He was indignant. He was grieved. He was troubled. He was disappointed. He was tearful. He was overcome by the prospect of future events. He exercised faith. He read the Scripture. He prayed. He sighed with an aching heart. He felt everything. You say your life is in danger? His was always in danger. You say you've been mistreated and misjudged? So was He.

During the sermon on the mount, one of the subjects Christ talked about was prayer. As He was instructing the people he added in Matthew 6:8, "for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

When you're down and hurting, it's God's total knowledge often becomes a source of comfort. Especially when an answer comes quickly, even as fast as while you're still praying. That happened to Daniel recorded in Daniel 9:21. He said while he was still praying, God sent His angel, Gabriel, to him.

It says in Isaiah 65:24 that this will be common in the life to come, "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." But even though God isn't always pleased to answer immediately every time we pray, it doesn't mean God isn't very aware of what we're going through.

Because God knows what you need. Before you ask.

Are you hungry? "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth more than they?" (Matthew 6:26)

Do you need clothing? "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow withers, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" (Matthew 6:28-30)

No matter what your need is, God knows. And He will answer in His own way and in His own time.

³¹So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

The reality is, when someone is suffering we don't know what they're going through. Even if we have experienced similar circumstances as a person who is suffering we don't process the world the way they do. And we don't have the same personal history, biological makeup, or support system. When someone is going through truly deeply tough times we can only know a tiny portion of what they are really experiencing.

Our limited ability to know the suffering of others is what makes 2 Corinthians 7:6 so precious. It says, "But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us..."

Jesus knows us fully. He knows our strengths and weaknesses, our family history, our biological makeup, our worldview. He knows every nook and cranny of us. He knows us better than we know ourselves. And he also knows suffering on an intense, personal level. Jesus' knowledge of suffering is not abstract, ivory tower, textbook knowledge. Jesus was a man of sorrows. He was mocked, betrayed, and humiliated. As he hung on the cross he was cut off from the Father. Jesus knew excruciating, overwhelming, crushing sorrow.

The combination of Jesus' omniscience and personal experience with deep suffering perfectly equip him to comfort us in our own suffering. He really does know what we're going through, and he is ready to comfort us when we are downcast. He doesn't leave us to muddle and slog through suffering on our own. He doesn't tell us to suck it up, buck up, and get up. He meets us in our downcast state and pours out grace upon us.

And when you are desperate, you need power. In the hour of need, all Christmas has to offer is Jesus Christ. And He is utterly sufficient. Only He can fill the heart with hope in the time of doubt. Only He can fill the heart with lasting joy in the time of sadness. Only He can fill the heart with peace in a time of fear. When life reaches its moment of desperation, the only hope is Christ.

But the day is coming when Jesus Christ the Anointed Savior, Immanuel will again be among us, in words we can only imagine the full meaning of, "in power and great glory." And in that day, we will receive one last gift; the gift of being gathered together with all the faithful throughout all history to overcome once and for all the gathering darkness of this world to live in the light of God's transforming, transfiguring love. Amen.