

Pastor Bill Sass – Sermon for Sunday, December 20, 2020

SON OF MAN; SON OF GOD

Luke 1: 26-38

There was a news story about a novel experiment by the University of Minnesota to foil Christmas tree thieves. It seems the year before, the university lost seven evergreens to poachers. So, the university began spraying balsam fir, Scotch pine, and anything that could pass for a holiday tree with skunk scent. Yes, skunk scent. For years, Christmas tree thieves have been sawing down trees in the middle of night. But in 2002, they topped the tops off 18-foot trees. The trees are permanently disfigured. So, the university decided to take action. So, why skunk? Can you think of something worse? Cold weather masks the smell. But warm, indoor air releases it. It's not going to work the way the thief thinks it will. However, what would the campus smell like when warm weather hits in the spring?

So, how do you change human behavior? Make the consequences so unpleasant people never want such an experience again? Then why do so many people released from prison commit crimes again? Can you imagine anything more unpleasant than being locked in prison? Obviously, something more than punishment is needed.

On this fourth Sunday of Advent, we are getting in the heart of Christmas. We've looked at the grandeur of God, and righteousness of God, and how critical these are to understanding Advent. Then last week, we focused on Jesus. He is the reason for the season. Now we move deeper in understanding Jesus. We move deeper to the most amazing part of the Christmas story—the Incarnation. **God became human flesh.**

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words, and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child, and

give birth to a son, and give Him the name Jesus. He will be great, and Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and will reign over the house of Jacob forever, His kingdom will never end.”

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the holy one will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.” “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me, as you have said.” (NIV)

The God of all creation became human flesh in the Babe of Bethlehem. But why? Why did God come down to where we are? And why take the form of a helpless Babe? This was God way of changing the heart of humanity.

Remember the objective is not to overwhelm us lest you rob us of the freedom to choose. The object is to win the hearts and souls of human beings, in order to fashion a new creation. How would God accomplish this? God would become one of us. Simple, and complicated, as that.

In his book, *The Regis Touch*, marketing expert Regis McKenna tells a story about Max Poll, CEO of Barnes Hospital in St. Louis, now Barnes-Jewish Hospital. Poll, disguised as a patient, has someone wheel him around the hospital on a Gurney to develop a feel for what it’s like to be a patient at Barnes. He doesn’t see much except the ceiling, but what he hears sensitizes him to the level of service the hospital provides.

He’s copying what God did in the Babe of Bethlehem. God came down where we are. Evidently, there was no other way to lift us up, than for God to come down to earth as one of us.

God emptied Himself. That’s the significance of the Babe in the manger. God, who is all powerful, made his appearance not in strength, but in absolute weakness. Who’s more helpless than a baby?

God emptied himself, and became a human being. Eugene Peterson, author of *The Message*, paraphrased the wonderful passage in Philippians 2:6-8 that speaks of Christ coming into the world like this. “When the time came, He set aside the privileges of deity, took on the status of a slave, and became human! Having

become human, He stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, He lived a selfless obedient life, and then died a selfless obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that: crucifixion.”

God became human flesh. God emptied Himself, and became a helpless Babe. GOD CAME DOWN TO LIFT US UP. That is what Christmas is all about. And there was only one purpose: God desires to make a change in our hearts. This is the heart of Christmas. It was all for making us into a new creation.

Dr. John Rosen, a psychiatrist in New York city, was well known for his work with chronic schizophrenics. Normally, doctors remain separate and aloof from their patients. But Dr. Rosen moved into the ward with them. He placed his bed among their beds. He lived the life they must live. Day to day, he shared their world.

This is what Christ did for us at Christmas. He moved into the ward with us. He placed His bed among our beds. Those who were there, those who saw Him, those who touched Him and were touched by Him, were restored to life. The first word they had to say was “thank you.” Christmas is our time to say, “Thank you.”

So, how would you go about changing human nature, without robbing our freedom to choose life, or death? God did it the only way possible. God came down where we are. He emptied Himself completely in our behalf, so we would respond in love. Wouldn't this be a good time to open yourself to let the love of Christmas fill your heart?

AMEN!!!

“S.D.G.”