**The Birth of Jesus is Good News**

Based on [Luke 2:1-20](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk2.1-20)

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Christmas Eve

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It really is a beautiful story. No room for Joseph and Mary at the in, s after giving birth, she wrapped the baby swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger. Meanwhile, an angel announces the birth of the Saviour and the sign to shepherds watching their flocks at night. And all this happened one night in the little town of Bethlehem. All this truly is beautiful, and one would need a heart of stone not to be moved by it.

That being said, t**he serenity and beauty surrounding this humble scene are of secondary importance. But that’s just the wrapping. It’s not the gift. It is an external beauty, but it’s what’s on the inside that counts.** The central thing to remember about the birth of Jesus Christ is not that it’s a beautiful story, beautifully told. The central thing about the birth of Jesus is that is Good News of great joy that shall be for all people. It is Gospel, Good News, because it is a gift of atonement and justification for the whole world, and because it brings peace to God’s people on earth.

The Birth of Jesus is a gift of atonement and justification for the whole world. “**The angel said to the shepherds, “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”** The birth of Christ is for every nation, race, tribe and tongue, for every man, woman and child. He is a gift to the world, in order to save the world, showing the goodness and loving kindness of God to all people. Not all will receive him as a gift, but he is a gift intended for all nonetheless. And this salvation takes place when those who receive the gift of atonement are justified by it.

Justification and Atonement are the greatest thing in the world. Money can’t buy them. Good deeds can’t earn them. The money you spend on Christmas gifts to make people feel loved can, make people feel loved, but they cannot justify and they cannot make atonement. But justification and atonement, they are things that everyone wants.

By nature, everyone wants to be reckoned good at least in their own eyes and in the eyes of others if possible. **And when they are bad they either try to atone for what they’ve done—make up for it through some sacrificial giving--or if the evil is so great that they cannot atone, they try to “justify” what they did, that they had a good excuse, that they were “justified” in their wrongdoing, or simply argue that the evil thing they did was actually good.** Even the devil has his reasons, his excuses for rebelling against God and tempting his creation that are right in his own eyes. And he desires others to consider him right as well, even as he bid Jesus to bow down and worship him. This all springs from a desire to be considered righteous, a desire to be good often twisted into evil.

But simply a desire to be good is no good before God. When you are standing before a judge charged with stealing, that you have a desire to not be a thief is no defense. Take the example of Judas, the friend who betrayed Jesus. **He had betrayed Jesus, and eventually the guilt of betraying innocent blood overcame him. And so he sought atonement, he tries to make up for what he did by giving the blood money back saying “I have sinned.”** Judas didn’t want to be a sinner. But the Chief Priests and elders agreed he was a sinner, but wouldn’t take the money back. So Judas, seeing no way to atone for his evil himself, and knowing there was no justification, no excuse for what he’d done. Refusing to receive atonement as a gift, he sought the only way he saw to escape his guilt. Death. Judas desired to be good, but that wasn’t enough to justify.

There is only one way to be righteous before God, and that is through confessing your sins and turning to the Son of God. And the Son of God is not far away in heaven, he has come to earth to atone for all people. That is the Christmas miracle. There is good news for sinners, for the guilty, for those who live with a troubled conscience, who feel the need to make excuses for their sins, or pretend they never happened. The good news is that a savior is born, and he is for all people, and he brings atonement and justification for all people.

The Birth of Jesus brings peace to God’s people on earth. The angels sing, “Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.” A savior is born, and those who receive him in the manger of faith have peace with God.

As the example of Judas shows, the road to hell is paved with good intention. But the Gospel shows the road to heaven is paved by Jesus, who was born into the world to justify the world. So our Epistle says, “ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by *the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us rightly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”*

Nobody is beyond hope. Do you want to be considered good and not evil? That is just not possible for sinful man. But what is impossible for man is possible with God. By the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on you in Baptism, God numbered you with the righteous one, Jesus Christ. You belong to him and he belongs to you. And if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you are one of the good guys. And you need no excuses, or works, or lies to cover your sin, you have the Son of God’s perfect sacrifice. And to those who turn to him will be forgiven, and have peace.

The central thing to remember about the birth of Jesus Christ is not that it’s a beautiful story, poetically told. The central thing about the birth of Jesus is that is Good News of great joy that shall be for all people. It is Gospel, Good News, because it is a gift of atonement and justification for the whole world, and because it brings peace to God’s people on earth.