

What Do We See in the Manger

Christmas

By Pastor Pieter Van Ruitenburg

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Luke 2:6-7
Preached on: Friday, December 25, 2020

Bethel Netherlands Reformed Congregation

8920 Broadway Street
Chilliwack, BC V2P 5W1

Website: www.nrcchilliwack.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/bnrcchilliwack

Congregation, this is a different Christmas. I don't think many of us have ever experienced something like this and yet it's not necessarily to be the worst Christmas. It could be the best Christmas. Let's think about that, the best Christmas ever today. It does not need to be a sad Christmas.

You know, we all would have loved to have large family gatherings and being together at the dinner table, in the church, hearing the old stories of Christmas, celebrating Christmas, singing together, listening to the sermons and the music, it all adds to the atmosphere but yet it also can be quite hollow. So when you look back to other Christmases in previous years, what don't you have right now? What do you have? You know, they can take privileges away but the message is the same, and if you have experienced that message in the past, may the Lord give us that again today. And honestly, frankly, the previous joy we have experienced before may not have been the real joy so maybe it is good that we are delivered from that shallowness and that we begin to listen to the real thing and looking for the real joy.

I think of Habakkuk. You remember Habakkuk 3:17, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom," on the fig tree no fruits, "neither shall fruit be in the vines," no grapes, "the labour of the olive shall fail," no olives, "and the fields shall yield no meat," no wheat and no corn, "the flock shall be cut off from the fold," no animals, "and there shall be no herd in the stalls," all empty, "Yet," look what it says, in spite of all those curses, "Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet." You know, I saw that last summer in the interior, I saw some deer frolicking in the weeds and what a beautiful thing that is, to see those animals jumping and leaping over fences and quite high, frolicking we call it, right? "The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places." May the Lord give that holy joy today and the best Christmas is something nobody can take away. It's in the Bible. It's in the word of God and that's what we hope to focus on today.

We keep it very simple, the text is Luke 2:6 and the first words of 7. Luke 2:6-7a.

6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn son,

So what do we see in the manger? That's the theme. What do we see in the manger? A human child. An innocent child. A divine child. An eternal child. Our child. What do we see in the manger? Five thoughts. We see a human child. Oh, that human nature, really beautiful. I see an innocent child in the manger. Do you see it? I see yet a divine child, there is also a divine nature. I see an eternal child, this child will not die, in a sense, but be raised up eternal. I see a child that the church may say is our child.

Congregation, not too long ago I preached on Genesis 3, and she ate and he ate. I think that is the blackest, most depressing chapter in the Bible. So down to earth about sin, about the fall, the deep fall in Adam, the entire mankind plunged into destruction, and that he made such a gulf between God and us, having sinned against a good-doing God, yet rebelling against him. That's awful. This might be the best page in the Bible, "she brought forth her firstborn son." The Lord Jesus Christ. You know, we have to see the background. When I show you a diamond on my hand, I have a diamond in my hand and I show it to the children and say, "What is this?" They look at it and they say a piece of glass, but you don't see the beauty of it. But if I take a dark piece of felt in a dark room, to leave a little bit of light and show that piece, that diamond, you see so many colors and the children say, "Ah, what is that? That's so beautiful." And that's also with Christ. You have to see it against the background. If you just hold it on your hand, the piece of diamond is just like glass, nothing special.

So we have to realize that in spite of all the lights and the joy of this world, something bad happened. This life is a life of darkness. We brought darkness into this world. We are lost by nature. This whole entire world is a world of sinners, of people that turn their backs to God. They don't want him, have better things to do than serving God, pleasing yourself, and we are also enemies of God by nature and spiritually dead in sins. So when God looked at mankind, what he would do with them after the fall, there was no empathy, there was nothing kind of, "I feel so sorry for those people." No. The Lord was angry with sin. He had to punish people. He was so disappointed and it grieved him to the heart that he had made man.

So if the Lord would have left us alone, it would have been justice, but somehow God made a way where there was no way, and he was yet willing to give his only begotten Son. Think about that, his only Son, to give to the world to save people. Not only to give more color to life, not to just give hope, not to make people feel happy but to save people from their sins. You know, look at that child in the manger and look at Joseph. He was not the father. Step-father, yes. Look at Mary. She delivered this child although she was a virgin. That's impossible. It happened. It's the first time ever and the last time ever. That son was born just out of a virgin and you would say, "Well, whatever." No, that is so important. The virgin birth of Christ, that he was the son of Mary but not the son of Joseph, that's so important. It's so essential. If you take that out, there's no salvation anymore.

You know, the resurrection is important of the Lord Jesus, that he rose from the dead after three days, but this is as important. If you take the resurrection away or the cross away, it's the same as taking the virgin birth away. Not the birth, the virgin birth. We may not take it away. And people may laugh about that and they say, "Whatever. It's a myth." No, it's essential. It's the Bible.

It has never happened before and it's not going to happen after either, and in this way and only in this way Christ was man, human, and God at the same time in order to be the only mediator between God and man. If he would have been just like anyone else, a son of Joseph and Mary together, he would not have been without sin. He would not have been the mediator. So he was born like all other people are born but yet in a very unique way, without sin. He is the same like anyone else and yet so different. He took upon himself the human nature and kept the divine nature.

So if Christ would have been born out of two people, he would not have been able to save us, and also it's interesting, the birth of the Lord Jesus was the initiative of God. God did not ask Mary for permission. God did not ask Mary to work together. No, it was just happening to Mary. It just happened. She became pregnant with that holy child and she delivered him.

It was God's doing and, congregation, that is so precious that the Lord does this, and yet he was without sin. You know the Son of God took upon himself the human nature and was that humbling? Well, the circumstance was not the most humbling thing. No, a stable and a manger and poor circumstances. Of course, there are circumstances that are poor and it was not a royal palace, and yet it's not especially the circumstances but that he had to begin to suffer in the human nature. You know, the birth of a child is always stressful not only for the mother but also the child, and so the Lord Jesus Christ began to suffer. Do you see the child in the manger? He was just born unto a stressful time and that's what the Lord Jesus had desired.

So he took upon himself the human body, the human nature, not of Adam and Eve before the fall. You know, see Adam and Eve before the fall, they were never sick. They never had pain. They never had a fever. They were never hungry. They were physically so well. They could not have a fever. They could not have a virus. They could not experience any hardship. They were perfect. And the Lord Jesus did not take upon himself that human nature but he took upon himself the human nature of after the fall when Adam had to sweat and to work and to suffer and to die. That's the human nature the Lord Jesus took upon himself. With that body he could suffer. Do you see the child in the manger? He took upon himself that body to suffer. That's not very romantic, is it?

So he wanted to experience the consequences of sin that he was going to absorb. The child in the manger, look in the manger, look at that child. He said, "Father, I'm willing to take upon myself that human nature because I would like to die, I would like to suffer, I would like to be frail and mortal." "He made himself of no reputation," Paul says, "took upon himself the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men, and be found in

the fashion of man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

So don't take those things away from Christmas. Christmas without nails, Christmas without the cross, Christmas without suffering, there's no Christmas. This body in the manger will be crucified. He will cry out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He will absorb the wrath of God in his body for the Lord Jesus was God. He did not lay aside all those holy attributes but he became a real man, real human out of the virgin Mary.

And then I don't only think of his body, I don't only think of his body. You know, he had the crown on his head, that head of the Lord Jesus in the manger, on that head the crown will be but the thorn crown. That baby that is growing up that will be scourged and spit on, with those eyes he will look upon Peter. There's more. He did not only receive the body, also his feelings, his feelings are really human, you know, how the Lord Jesus was sometimes marveled, right, doesn't it say in the Bible that he marveled? That's quite something. He marveled because of their unbelief. So in his human nature, he was sometimes marveling, sometimes grieving, grieving, for example, at the grave of Lazarus we see he was grieving. So he was really human, that baby in the manger had feelings. The Lord Jesus sometimes cried, babies cry.

So the Lord Jesus became really human not only with the body but feelings, real human feelings. He also sometimes rejoiced. Not only a body, not only feelings, what about his understanding? He had a human brain. With his divine nature he knew more than he knew with his human nature because he said himself that he did not know when he would come back, when the kingdom of God would come. He said, "I don't know, only the Father knows." So in his human nature he had also a human understanding, human brain. He also had a human will. "Not my will by thy will be done." So he did not only have a divine will with the Father always united, also a human will. And it was a good will. It was a real will.

So why did the Lord Jesus become so completely human with a body and feelings and understanding and a will and everything? Well, to save people with their body and with their feelings and with their understanding and with their will and to change them completely into the image of God. So what the Lord Jesus did not assume he cannot deliver. Remember that? Understand that? What he did not assume he cannot deliver so he assumed that nature and those feelings and the will and the understanding because now he can change people completely with everything of who they are.

A human child. Also an innocent child. You know, the Son of God took upon himself the true nature of Adam. There was no difference except one thing. The child in the manger, look at that. Look at the child. Think about that. He had no sin. He was so equal to his brethren in all things except sin. He was the holy child, that holy thing. He could not sin. He did not want to sin. He was perfect.

So there was a child in the manger so completely different, so pure, so holy, so immaculate, so good. So later on and before never ever someone could possibly convict him of any sin. Nobody has ever seen him say something bad as a child or later. He had no sin. Pilate could not find fault in him. He was the person the Apostle Paul was talking about that he knew no sin. He was the fairest of all men. What a difference with us. He was not carnal. He was not sold unto sin. He was the opposite. He took upon himself the human nature but also still resembles his Father, without sin. He never had wrong intentions. And when the Father looked at him, now we look in the manger, we see the child but the Father in heaven looked upon this child in the manger, the angels were singing, the shepherds were coming, the wise men were coming, but God the Father looked at the child himself as well, and the Father could say, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." You know, very simply said, the Lord can't say that about me. You? Can he say that's my beloved son, I'm so pleased with him? I'm so pleased with that girl? I'm so pleased with that man? I can't find any sins. I'm so happy about that. The Lord Jesus pleased his Father but we can't please him. He was so different. But the Father spoke later at his baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear him."

So look at that child in the manger, human, born from the virgin, the only mediator between God and man. No sin and completely human in his understanding and feelings and everything to save people completely. You know, I like that text on 2 Corinthians 5. You know that, "For he," that's God, "For hath made him," his Son, "to be sin," he has made him, "to be sin for us, who knew no sin." So he is called someone who knew no sin. He had no idea about it, no understanding of that, no experience with it. He knew no sin, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." What a dear God. What a beloved Savior. So good to give him over unto death who had no sin.

"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." No sin. Sweet. "For such an high priest became us," it is fitting, more than fitting, "who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens."

So why, why did Christ have to be complete, sinless man? Well, there are at least eight points, eight reasons why the Lord Jesus had to be a perfect human. So you probably won't remember all eight of them so at home you may want to write them down. Eight reasons why the Lord Jesus was a perfect human in the manger.

In the first place, he became the second Adam. Do you see the child in the manger? Compare him to Adam in paradise. Adam was the head of mankind and this is the substitute, the Lord Jesus, to save people as the second Adam. So in order to be the second Adam, he wanted to be obedient, right? Because Adam was disobedient the Father said, "I will send someone else who will finally be obedient to my entire law." And the Lord Jesus came, the child in the manger came to never sin, to be the second Adam, to save people who have sinned against all God's commandments.

Secondly, so he took upon himself that human body without sin in order to be able to suffer and die. Well, we talked about that already. So he was the substitute and now he could die as a human.

And in the third place, now he can be the mediator. The Lord Jesus in the manger was the mediator between God and man. So with sin he could not have been the mediator because who would God listen to, to someone who had sinned himself? No, he's the mediator between God and man.

In the fourth place that's kind of less familiar, as the second Adam he will reign over this earth. Adam and Eve, Adam especially was reigning, he was the king of the world, and so the Lord Jesus is the second Adam and reigns. All power is given unto him.

And in the fifth place, in order to be an example to be imitated so that people would say, "I would like to live like he lived." As an example. So the Lord Jesus was that great superb example of holiness, not only to substitute but also to show people, "This is how I want you to live."

And in the sixth place, he took upon himself that human nature and we see it in the manger to be the first one to rise from the dead, to rise from the dead with his body and that's why the Lord Jesus came. He took upon himself a human nature so he could be the first one rising from the dead.

And also to be an empathizing high priest, to feel, right, with people.

And also in the eighth place, to bring that human nature to heaven because he rose on ascension day. That same nature, that same body, he took it to heaven.

So human child, an innocent child, yet a divine child, third thought. You know, congregation, although the Lord Jesus was completely human, in a human nature, even his soul was human. I notice at Catechism classes over time that still quite a few young people think that the Lord Jesus had a divine soul. His body was human, they say, and his soul inside was divine. No. "No? His soul, what was his soul then?" His soul is human. He was so completely human. Is your soul human or divine? Human, right? So the Lord Jesus took upon himself the complete nature of man so also the soul, to save the soul, right? He took upon himself the body and the soul and the feelings and everything to save them. What he doesn't assume he cannot save.

But the Lord Jesus did not have a divine soul but he had something else that was divine, a divine nature. So that child in the manger has two natures. One person, two natures: the human nature and the divine nature. He's God also. He remains God. He did not lay down his holy attributes. He did not lay down his divinity. No, he kept it. So the child in the manger kept the omnipotence and the wisdom in his divine nature.

You know, some people say he was kind of half human, half divine. So they split him up in two parts, a divine Jesus and a human Jesus. Two Jesuses. No, you cannot separate

those two natures. He is not half God and half man. Well, others have said his natures are a mix so he is kind of a mix of God and man. Well, if you mix water with something else, it's not pure water anymore. It's mixed. But the Lord Jesus is completely human and is not mixed with his divinity. It's not separate. It's not mixed either. It's a mystery.

So two natures in one person and he is called in the Bible the Word. The Word was in the beginning. The Word was with God and the Word was God. He is the Lord, the Kurios God in the Bible. He was from eternity. He said to his audience, "Before Abraham was, I was." He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." It refers to Exodus 3, to the fact that he is the "I Am that I Am." I Am.

So he also showed many of those divine attributes, so Christ had to be completely human and innocent, also he had to be God. Why? Three points. Three points why the Lord Jesus had to be God. Well, what if he would not have been God? He could not have been able to bear that infinite wrath of God. He would have just have perished. He would not have been able to say, "It is finished!" He would not have been able to absorb it all. He would have succumbed. He would have passed out before. He would have died before he could do the work but his divine nature supported his human nature so he could take it all in, so he could say, "It is finished!"

So look at that child in the manger. That is such a beautiful child, completely human and innocent and I don't see it but he is God. He has a divine nature. He can bear the wrath. He did. So that's number 1 and number 2 is only God can save people because people fell so deep at the bottom of that ravine, and it's so impossible to save them and to change them and to make them born again and to make them willing. It's an impossible task. You can't save anyone. You can't change anyone, that's a new birth. But the Lord Jesus can. He said to that man that was lowered by his friends before him, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." And they said, "Who can forgive sins but God?" That's right. He can. He can begin that salvation. He can finish it. He can complete everything. He is God. So the child in the manger, what I would do is I would seek him and flee unto him and look upon him, and we need to believe in him with a true faith.

So he had to be divine in order to absorb the wrath and also so he can save people. We also know he can be a mediator between God and man, right? If he would have been only man, what a mediator is that that had no relation to God? But he is God himself and he is man himself so he is the perfect mediator between God and man. You know, our understanding is limited. The Lord Jesus' natures are not mixed, not separate either. You know, at a certain time the Lord Jesus was 12 years old, right, when he went into the temple and his parents could not find him, 12 years old. But his divine nature was not 12. He was from eternity. So there is something we cannot fathom. It's easier to say what it wasn't than what it was. In his divine nature, he knew everything. In his human nature, he was limited because he grew in understanding it says. He increased in understanding in his human nature.

So look at the child in the manger, so human from the virgin birth, and so immaculate, no sin, no vileness, and God himself is the perfect Savior between God and man, and he also

the eternal child, our fourth thought. "And she brought forth her firstborn son." It's a simple message and that baby in the manger was eternal. He came but he's eternal. His divine nature is from eternity to eternity and his human nature has a beginning but no end. You would say, "Well, he was crucified. He died. He was buried." That's right but his body became immortal. This same Jesus in the manger took upon himself the human nature to never let it go anymore. He never laid his human nature down again. He kept it. He kept his human nature all through eternity and he will never lay it down at all ever. It's an eternal human nature.

You know, it's the same with us. With us? Yes, because we are born someday and our body and soul started and it will never end. We have an immortal soul but we have also an eternal body because after our death even the dust returns to dust, but there will be a time that we will be raised from the dead. So the body of the Lord Jesus in the manger is a body that is mortal and he'll die but he will keep it. He will be resurrected. He will take it to heaven and he will keep it forever and someday you will see him. "You mean spiritually?" No, I mean literally, I mean physically with our physical eyes after the resurrection, I suppose. With our physical eyes we will see a physical Jesus. We will see that same Jesus that was in the manger. We will see the exact same body personally with our own eyes.

So not only with our soul's eyes but with our physical eyes. So think about that, what that will be if you're one of God's people and you may see him with joy and he says, "You are my child. I died for you. I'm here for you. I pray for you." And if you may find him, the Apostle Paul said, "I wish to depart and to be with Christ, to see him in his glory." So again, not only our soul has a destiny, also our body has. That's why he had a body. The Lord Jesus did not only want to save souls, that's not enough, he did not make souls in paradise, he made humans with a body in paradise. So he is going back to paradise. He's going back to the first thing he did to create man, and he will have perfect people with body and soul living on the new earth.

You know, eternity, that takes a long time. You know, what would it be to just count all the grains of sand one after another? How long would that take? How long would it take to stare at all the different stars? You don't come to the end of that. There is not an unlimited amount of sand, it's limited. There is not an unlimited amount of stars although it kind of feels like it. But you know, technically you can't say there's an infinite amount of it. But eternity is without end. After you die, it begins. And then it is so important if that Savior Jesus Christ has become our Savior with body and soul.

God is infinite. You know, the body of God's people in heaven, that same body will not be infinite. It will be eternal but not infinite. Eternal is a time thing. It goes on and on and on. Infinite is that you are a spirit. But God is infinite. So finite people in heaven will not be able to completely absorb an infinite God so that takes an eternity. So let me say it in a more understanding way. God's people will never be bored in heaven. There's always something else, always something new, always something they haven't seen before because in their bodies, right, think of the body of Jesus, in their bodies they are limited.

So it takes a long time before they have absorbed who God is. That's all in Christmas, the body of the Lord Jesus in the manger.

But now the last thing, that child in the manger, is it yours? Is it ours, our fifth thought. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." "Unto us," who is that? Who is "unto us is born"? You know, let us think about our rights or rather our privileges. We come short of the glory of God. The Bible says that we don't deserve grace whatsoever. We don't. So we have no rights but we have privileges, right? We have the privilege of life and hopefully you're healthy and you have the privilege of hearing the gospel and you also have the privilege of receiving access to God's throne. Or do you think the gates are closed of that palace of the king? You know, when you think of that place in Bethlehem where it was in [unintelligible] or in the inn or downstairs or in the field, in a cave, wherever it was, there was no gate, there was no fence, there was no door, there was nothing locked. So anyone was welcome so those shepherds just could come in and those wise men, they could come in because all people have received, received, don't deserve it but they have received free the right of access.

So not all people have the right to say, "I'm a child of God." Not all people can say, "I claim to be a child of God because everyone can claim that. I'm a child of God." No, that's the right the Lord gives to his people. You need to be born again. God's children have the right of eternal life so I can say you have the right of eternal life, the Lord Jesus earned that right for his church, but I can say you have the right of access. You don't need special permission to enter into that stable. You have permission. You don't need to buy a ticket for that. You don't need to pay for that. The door is open and that means that sinners are welcome no matter how much we have sinned against a holy God.

You know, you remember Matthew 22 about the royal wedding, "Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage." Come to the marriage. All things ready for people that never came? Yes. All things are ready for people that never came. So it was ready and they didn't come so the servants need to go to the highways and the byways to get other people in, but think of the first people invited, all things were ready for them and they did not come. So they had an invitation, they had the right of access but they refused to come. They had other things to do.

And that's now also true for this brother Jesus. That door is open and you have received permission to come. I'll tell you what, we can hear that hundreds of times and nobody will come by themselves. That's so bad. The Lord Jesus, he sent his only Son, the light of the world, he came to his own and his own received him not, and we reject him. All people do. No exception unless the Holy Spirit comes and let's you hear it, what you should hear. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." And yet the Lord Jesus was born and was given to mankind, so in a sense we can say that to all, "For unto

us a child is born." But that does not make you saved. He is born to us. You need that repentance and to believe in him.

You know, it's a special Christmas day today compared to previous ones but may we eat his flesh, may we drink his blood, may we have his fellowship, may we have that joy, may we have that taste of God's grace, may we have heaven in our hearts.

So is he yours, that Savior in the manger? Is he your Savior? Yes? Then don't be so sad today and don't miss the other things too much today. If you have him, don't be so sad, please. But don't you have him? Don't be so happy then. If you don't have him, if he is not your Savior, then don't be too happy. Don't be too happy then. Seek the Savior Jesus Christ who came to seek and to save them that are lost.

Come unto the marriage. All things are ready. Oh, I think of those hesitant ones, those standing far away, not daring to come close to the Savior. You know, I understand you. You look at yourself, you look at your vile clothes and you look at your soul and you say, "I don't qualify." I see your point but the Lord Jesus came to save the lost ones. Not the good ones. So you don't need to qualify, you don't need to have something to please God with. He pleased his Father, right? He pleased his Father tremendously. The Father could only smile upon him. So he deserved it and yet the Lord Jesus Christ although he knew no sin, he was made to be sin for us to make us the righteousness of God in him.

So what an exchange, that baby in the manger, that child in the manger was going to pay the price, and he is now at the right hand of God and he will come again to judge the quick and the dead. Amen.