

God's Perfect Plan

- After some last-minute Christmas shopping with her grandchildren, Grandma was rushing them into the car when four-year-old Jason said, "Grandma, Susie has something in her pocket." He reached in and pulled out a new red hairclip. Grandma was tired but she took the kids back in so little Susie could put the hairclip back where she got it. Later at the grocery store checkout, the clerk asked, "Have you kids been good this year?" "I've been very good," said Jason, "but my sister just robbed a store."
- What a miracle Christmas is! God came to us, not because we had been "good," but because we had not been anywhere close to good. C.S. Lewis wrote, "The Son of God became man to enable men to become the sons of God."
- How do we understand such a gift? Martin Luther said, "The mystery of the humanity of Christ, that he sunk himself into our flesh, is beyond all human understanding."
- But I would like us to draw closer to understanding this mystery this morning by looking at it from a God's-eye view, as much as we are enabled to do that through the Scriptures. What was God's plan for the first advent, the first coming of Christ? Let's look at 3 prophecies today that long ago began to tell us the story of Christmas.
- **God would send the Messiah, who would emerge victorious. (Genesis 3:15)**
- One of the consequences of sin is that there will be a perpetual struggle between good and evil that will not end, as we know from Scripture, until Jesus comes for a second and final time! When we studied Genesis, we talked about what is called the Protoevangelium, or "first good news." God says, "he (Jesus) will bruise your head, and you (Satan) shall bruise his heel." The imagery is of a man and a snake, where the snake strikes at the man's heel, but the man crushes the snake's head. Satan was allowed by God to inflict temporary pain and death on Jesus, a brutal crucifixion and three days in a tomb, but on that same cross Jesus inflicted a permanent blow to Satan and his kingdom. Paul wrote that through Jesus' death God canceled the debt that we owed because of sin. "This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him." -Colossians 2:13-15
- From our study in 1 Peter, we know that this plan that was announced by God in the garden started long before the garden! In fact, the plan of God was in place before *time* had been created. Peter wrote, "...you were ransomed... not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was *foreknown before the foundation of the world...*" (1 Peter 1:18-20) Christmas started in heaven, before the earth was hung in the sky. Before there even *was* a sky!
- Jesus confirmed this in his parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25. "Then the King will say to those on the right, 'Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"
- The preparations for a Fox daughter outdoor wedding next June have only just begun, and there is a lot to do and a lot of variables, like will it rain and how many people will come and how much food do we need? But we who are weak can trust in our infinite and almighty God to help us prepare for that blessed event. How hard can it be for the One who made sure that *all* the preparation for the great and final wedding was in place before the earth even existed! We know from Genesis 3 that God would send a human Messiah. We know from Genesis 12 that...
- **The Messiah would come out of Israel (Genesis 12:3) Read verse on screen.**
- This promise was given to Abraham, the father of the people of God and nation of Israel. Jesus was the fulfillment of that promise, that God's blessing on Abraham would result in all the families of the earth being blessed. Peter confirmed this in Acts 3 after a crowd was filled with wonder and amazement that a man lame from birth, a beggar who sat outside the temple, was healed. Peter asked the men of Israel why they wondered at this and said, "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of

Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate...You killed the Author of life whom God raised from the dead...And *his* name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong...” Peter then takes them back to Abraham and says, “You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.’” (Acts 3:13-16, 25-26) Jesus was sent to you, first, Peter said! “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him,” John wrote in his prologue. And most of them still do not believe. So we pray.

- We learn from Genesis 12 that the Messiah would come from Israel. And then we learn from Genesis 49 that...(turn to Genesis 49 with me)
- **The Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah. (Genesis 49:10-12)**
- Jacob prophesied on his deathbed over his 12 sons and from Judah he said, “The scepter shall not depart.” The Messiah would come from the house of David. The prophecy for Judah is for the time to come in the establishment of Israel as a nation. The people will have their earthly king through Judah’s ancestor David and those who follow him, until the time that an earthly king is no longer needed or wanted. But it also points to the final fulfillment in Jesus, the Son of David, who would be born in Bethlehem.
- The people at the Feast of Booths heard Jesus say on the last day, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” So the people debated with one another who this was, a man from Galilee of all places, who would make such a bold claim. Then some replied, ***Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?*** -John 7:42
- God did not just tell us through Jacob that the Messiah would come through the tribe of Judah. God also told us about the death of the Messiah, and the blood that would be necessary to satisfy God’s wrath. *Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.* This prophecy over Judah goes beyond the earthly ministry of Jesus to the time of his return! The language used reminds us of the first miracle Jesus performed, at a wedding in Cana. Remember? The wedding party had run out of wine and Jesus’ mother asked him to do something about it. Jesus said, “What does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” But out of love for his mother and to save the wedding party from disgrace, he turned more than 120 gallons of water into wine! The finest wine anyone that day had ever tasted. What happened when his hour did come? We see Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey’s colt. We see him washing his garments in the wine of his blood, as Jacob prophesies here. We see the King become the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. **Then**, we see his future return, that glorious day we long for. The imagery of wine and milk **is** used to describe the age that will never end and be marked by abundance and joy and peace and the glory of God. That’s what we long for. That’s why Jesus died and was raised again for our sake, that we might be with him forever. And this was God’s perfect plan for you and me.
- James Allan Francis wrote the following and delivered it as part of a sermon in 1926: “Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another obscure village, where He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty, and then for three years He was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never owned a home. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put his foot inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself. He had nothing to do with this world except the naked power of His divine manhood. While still a young man, the tide of public opinion turned against Him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth while He was dying—and that was his coat.

When he was dead, He was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone and today He is the centerpiece of the human race and the leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever were built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that One Solitary Life." That quote reminds us of the humility and the majesty of Christ. The next one points us to his love for us.

- Leonard Vander Zee writes, "God, our divine parent, with daring and dangerous abandon, bared his heart at Bethlehem. He does not wish to be God without us, so he becomes God with us. He comes down from the far reaches of eternity to become an infant. In that infant, born of poor people in a stable, God comes to earth and says, "I love you."
- How utterly appropriate that we celebrate communion today, as we will again on Christmas Eve, for where is this vulnerable love made more real, where does it touch our hearts more than at the communion table? The baby laid in the manger was also nailed to a cross. The God who laid himself in Mary's lap, placed himself in the hands of Pontius Pilate. He comes to us this morning in the bread and the cup. He invites us all to eat and drink that vulnerable love, receiving his loving self-sacrifice into our hearts.
- Prayer
- Communion
- Greet One Another