

PREPARED, WRAPPED, LAID IN HAY

Psalm 40:6-8, Hebrews 10:1-8, Luke 2:1-7

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Wally was pretty big for his age, seven years old. He and others wondered what role his teacher would give him in the annual Christmas play. She made Wally the innkeeper and he was delighted. All he had to learn to say was one line. That line is virtually the same as the last phrase of Luke 2:7—Wally got that line down in no time, “There is no room in the inn.” Then came the night of the program with all the parents in their places and the auditorium was filled. The children came in singing, “O Come All Ye Faithful. The lights dimmed and a hush fell over the audience. The curtains opened to scene one. Mary and Joseph entered the stage and walked up to the inn. They knocked and the innkeeper came to the door. Joseph said, “Please sir, my wife is not well. Could we have a room for the night?”

Wally started his lines, “There is...and he trailed off, going completely blank. He stammered and stuttered and the whole audience was embarrassed for him. Joseph thought he would improvise, so he took Mary and started walking toward the stable on the left. As Joseph walked away, Wally in desperation called out, “Look, there’s plenty of room at my house, just come on home with me.” The audience cheered. Somehow all of us like to think we have room for Jesus.

But when Jesus was born, there was no room for Jesus in the economic world, no room for Him in the legal realm, no room for him in the world of politics, no room even among the religious leaders of His day. As we come to this message today, God has focused my heart and mind and thoughts on the Father’s preparations for Jesus’ birth. There was room in God’s heart for us, or He would not have sent us His only begotten Son. There was room in Mary and Joseph’s heart, or they would not have followed the words of the angels. God had done His part and so were Mary and Joseph doing their part on that night when Jesus was born.

Today, I am calling us to meditate on three special provisions for Jesus’ birth and for immediately after His birth. I want us to focus on three verbs—three Christmas words, **prepared**, **wrapped**, and **laid** in a manger. God the Father did the preparing. Joseph and Mary did the wrapping, and the laying of Jesus in a manger. It is my understanding that Jesus, our Savior accepted all three provisions made for Him that He might be made the atoning sacrifice for us and the divine provision for us to be forgiven from our sin.

In Jesus’ submission to these three divine provisions, I see for us all a model we ought to accept as we ask God to give us an incarnational ministry to others—that is, “a Christ in you, the hope of glory” kind of ministry. Paul wrote to us in Philippians 2:5, “Let this mind be in you which was also in

Christ Jesus. “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.” What are these three special provisions for Jesus’ birth that our Lord accepted? Are we allowing God to make preparations for us so like Jesus, we can have a “Christ in you, the hope of glory” kind of ministry to others?

PROVISION # 1 – JESUS HAD A BODY PREPARED FOR HIM.

Turn to Hebrews 10 and we will stay here a little while. We read in Hebrews 10:5, “Consequently, when Christ came into the world, He said, “Sacrifices and offerings You have not desired, but a body You have prepared for Me.” Stay in Hebrews 10 and notice the context in verse 4 which declares, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” Despite all the animal sacrifices offered up by the people of Israel for their sins, over all the centuries, only one sacrifice offered once for all would do. It would require the once for all offering of “the Lamb of God.” As John the Baptist, Jesus’ forerunner cried out in the wilderness by the Jordan, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29)

Yet that perfect Lamb could be none other than God Himself in the person of His Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. No ordinary man, no matter how powerful or wise or morally upright he might be, could ever accomplish such a mighty task. Neither could an angel remove human sin from the world. Only God could do that, but He must become man in order to pay the death penalty for man’s sin. As the God/man He must also defeat death and live forever with those who would receive Him as Savior. This perfect Lamb must be both eternal God and perfect man. For this mission, He must have a human body, a very special body with no inherited Adamic sin nature and no genetically inherited mutational blemishes. So God had to be the author of this miracle, “A body You have prepared for Me.”

The Greek word for prepared is **katartidzo**. It means to complete thoroughly, to perfectly join together, or to frame. In most passages in the Bible, **katartidzo** is translated to make perfect. But this Greek word is used only one other time in Hebrews in Hebrews 11:3. The text there reads, “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the Word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.”

This use of the word **katartidzo** helps us understand God’s preparation of the body of Jesus to become the perfectly framed body that cruel soldiers would nail to a cruel cross. The human body of Jesus was framed/prepared in the virgin Mary’s womb with the same perfect wisdom and care with which Jesus Himself framed the worlds. Both the creation and this body were made “very good”—perfectly designed, created, and made to accomplish God’s great eternal plan. There is a very strange part to this prophecy of a prepared body for Jesus. In the Messianic Psalm which Hebrews 10 quotes, in Psalm 40:6—it reads a little different. It reads, “In sacrifice and offering You have not delighted, but You have given Me an

open ear.” This phrase, “You have given Me an open ear,” is translated by the inspiring Holy Spirit in Hebrews as—“But a body Thou hast prepared for Me.” God’s Word makes clear in numerous places that burnt offerings and sin offerings were indeed once required from God’s people under the Law of Moses. Yet, these sacrifices were not an end in themselves. In fact, these sacrifices were meaningless unless they were offered out of a willing heart as obedient expressions of submission to a forgiving God.

David’s words in Psalm 40:6 state, “My ears Thou hast opened.” The implication of the “opened ear” was that a servant or slave was willing from that day on to hear only the voice of his master and to submit to His will in all things. Exodus 21:5,6 tells us, “But if a freed slave or bondservant plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out as a free man.’ Then his master shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently.”

This picture of a bondservant whose ear is bored through with an awl is the Messianic picture of Jesus and His body to be pierced through for you and me. Somehow, the Holy Spirit who is His own perfect interpreter of the inspired Word of God translated, from Psalm 40:6, “My ear Thou hast opened” by another phrase, “a body Thou hast prepared Me.” In essence, the picture is, “You have so touched me or bored a hole in my ear so that everything you tell me to do, I hear and obey. Just as the perfect submission of a slave who would not leave his master required that he have his ear opened by an awl upon a doorpost, so the perfect submission of the Son of God required that He become a man, with a very special body prepared by His Father so He could go to the cross as a spotless Lamb for our sins. In essence, the words in Hebrew are the same as Psalm 40:6, meaning “The body You prepared for Me enables me to fully know Your will and do Your will. In the incarnation, Jesus, the God-Man was given a prepared body in which He would fully know and do all God’s will. Hebrews 10:7 reads, “Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God, as it is written of Me in the scroll of the Book.’” Hebrews 10:10 tells us, “By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Think of it—a body prepared. Jesus accepted this provision for Him even though He created the world. That is the ultimate in humility and love. Now I ask us today—what provisions does God have in mind for us that we may be reluctant to receive and obey/fulfill? Are we bondslaves who will spiritually go to the doorpost and have our ears opened for our Master? What provisions that God has asked for us to receive and follow have we fought against and refused? Paul’s words now ring in my ears, in Romans 12:1,2—“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Christmas is all about Jesus having a prepared body—and beloved, it’s all about us—you and me, desiring our bodies to be prepared too. Jesus had a prepared body because of the unity of the Godhead—the Trinity. Jesus, God the Son was submissive to the Father. And the preparation of our bodies (plural) as a living sacrifice (singular) requires that we submit together to God’s will. We must submit as husbands and wives, and parents and children, as pastors and people. Independence is not the hallmark of a prepared body—but submission in unity is. Is our body prepared for Christmas? Is our family as a body prepared for Christmas? Is our church body prepared for Christmas? That’s the first provision for Christmas. 2ndly,

PROVISION # 2 – JESUS HAD HIS BODY WRAPPED FOR HIM!

Now let’s turn to our familiar Luke text in Luke 2:7. “And she gave birth to her first-born son; and wrapped him in swaddling clothes.” What a provision for the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords! The picture here is that this little tender newborn infant baby boy, Jesus was tightly wrapped in cloths. Swaddling clothes consisted of squares of cloth with a long bandage like strip coming diagonally off one corner. The child was first wrapped in the square of cloth as a diaper. Then the long strip was wound round and around the baby and finally tucked in. The baby was tightly wrapped.

This second provision for Christ at Christmas was the confining of Jesus infant body even as it happened to you and me when we were babies. It seems so normal for us, but it wasn’t normal for Jesus. He wrapped us as people, in flesh, and we came into the world as babies, wrapped in diapers. But think of our Redeemer accepting the confining of Himself to the wrappings of a human mother, Mary.

The Greek word for wrapped is **sparganoo**. It comes from the verb **spao** which means to draw tightly, to pull. **Spao** can also speak of drawing a sword from a sheath. But in **sparganoo**, it means to pull the infant child tightly with the diagonal strip wound round and round. Jesus was willing to be confined tightly for us. Think of it! As we enter this Christmas season of 2023, how have we allowed the Lord to confine us for His purpose? Being a living sacrifice for God isn’t about getting our way or feeling comfortable. Being a living sacrifice for God is about accepting the yoke God gives us, accepting the way He leads us, and the confining and molding of His hands.

Watch a potter with clay as he wraps the clay in his steady hands and tightly confines the clay putting pressure on the clay to mold it. Are we accepting the provisions of God this Christmas or are we breaking out? Are we saying, “No, I want my own way, my own will, my own place that I choose, my own plan that I have, my own design that I desire?” Christmas is about wrapping—but not primarily about the wrapping up of gifts for others to open, but the birth of Christ is about the wrapping of Jesus by Mary which He accepted as a baby for us, so that we might learn to be wrapped in His

will, regardless of its shape or size if it is His will for His glory. Christmas is about a body prepared and wrapped. Thirdly, and lastly,

PROVISION # 3 – JESUS HAD HIS BODY LAID IN A MANGER.

Notice Luke 2:7. We read, “and she wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” The Greek word is **anaklino**. In this verse, Jesus is passive—that is, He is allowing Himself to be wrapped and now to be laid in a cow trough, a manger. The word **anaklino** means to be leaned back, to be made to sit down or lie down. The Son of Man, who had no place to lay His head, (Mt. 8:20) Jesus was laid, made as a baby to lie down in a cattle’s manger of hay or straw. It was a trough to feed cows and horses. There was no room for Jesus in the inn. That’s why Mary laid Him in a cattle manger. There was no room in the hearts of those to whom He came. John 1: 11, tells us “He came unto His own and His own received Him not. Jesus’ purpose and plan in coming to each in His incarnation was to allow His prepared body to be laid down upon a cross where He would die for us. There was room for Him on a cross, so today, there is room at the cross for us. The whole issue of the verb **anaklino** is that someone else is doing the placing of us. It appears Mary was doing the placing of Jesus, but ultimately, the placement of the baby Jesus in a manger, was the placement of God the Father.

At this beginning of the Christmas season, Christmas is about prepared bodies, wrapped in God’s will, and placed in His placement, not our choice. God’s placement needs to become our choice, but it isn’t always or often that where God chooses for us to work, where He calls us to go, what He calls us to do, and why He chooses us to do what He requires—is our first choice. Many of us may be struggling at our job. Has God placed you in this manger for His glory? Have you been bucking His will for future service? The question is, Has God placed you in this manger of a place for His glory?

Remember, God’s placement of us, as of Jesus, may seem out of place. Didn’t Jesus deserve to be in the most beautiful cradle ever built? Yes, He did, but what He deserved was not the Father’s will. Being out of place in a cattle manger was the Father’s will. Being called to Rock Springs to serve Jesus may not be your favorite manger placement. But I ask each of us, “Will we receive God’s placement of us here today as His will, accepting God’s will as Jesus did? Christmas is about accepting the place God calls you to serve, accepting the way God calls you to serve, accepting the people God calls you to serve, accepting the lessons and the limits of God’s placement. Pastor Will and I spoke this week about God placing us here, with the opportunities and the limits of God’s call. We each shared how God has marked us and planned for us to be here. I pray, “God make us like Jesus, prepared to do Your will with bodies presented as living sacrifices to You, wrapped in His confining, conforming hands and laid in His placement for us, even if it seems out of our place. I love you all. Amen.