

TITLE: "What If Jesus Had Not Been Born?"

TEXT: Luke 1:26-38 (NT pp. 56-57)

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But [Mary] was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God."

³⁸Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Introduction - If Jesus had not been born

What if Mary had told the angel that she did not want her life turned upside down, that she wasn't interested in God's plan and that she refused to have God's baby?
What if Jesus had NOT been born?Well, there would be a LOT of changes.

If Jesus had not been born I would not have prepared this sermon and you would not be here because there would be no sanctuary and no church. In fact, there would be no churches ANYwhere. No crosses above skylines. No steeples pointing people to God. Today would not be the Lord's Day, it would be just another day.

There would be no Christmas. No celebration. No day off on the Monday after Christmas. No school vacation. ...This would NOT be the year of our Lord 2011. I don't know what year it would be, but it would not be based on Before Christ, BC or Anno Domini, AD system we use.

There would be no manger scene out front, no Christmas trees, no Christmas carols, no thrill at hearing the *Halleluiah Chorus* from Handel's *Messiah*. No decorations in the Village of Dryden and no Christmas lights at night, no Christmas parties, no Christmas cookies and no candy canes. No giving and receiving of gifts, no Christmas stockings, no little children counting the days till Christmas.

...But Mary DID say, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." And Jesus WAS born and wrapped in bands of cloth and laid in a manger. And because Jesus WAS born, we have received all these blessings and many more.

1. Because Jesus was born, we have forgiveness for our sins

Because Jesus was born, we have forgiveness for our sin. ...In Matthew 1, the angel in Joseph's dream said to him, "[Mary] will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he exclaimed, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" In fact, the name Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua, which means "The Lord Saves."

I'm not sure people know the full extent of their sin until they become Christians. Once we accept Jesus Christ as Savior, and the presence of the Lord starts to live within us, we begin to see things from God's perspective. THEN, and only then, do we begin to see how MANY of our thoughts, words and actions are contrary to God's will.

I remember hearing of a missionary in Alaska who was explaining this to one of the native Alaskans and the man said, "If I do not know something is sin, am I guilty of it?"

The missionary said, "Well, no."

"Then," the man said, "Why did you tell me?"

The reason is the fact that we are here, on earth, for a very limited time, to get ready to spend eternity with the Lord in heaven. Part of our preparation is resisting the things God sees as sin and living out the life God wants us to lead.

One of my favorite hymns is, “It Is Well with My Soul” written by Horatio Spafford. The third stanza goes:

My sin—O, the bliss of this glorious thought,
My sin—not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

Thank you God, for the gift of Jesus.

2. Because Jesus was born, we have eternal life

Because Jesus was born, we have eternal life. ...Probably the most well known verse in the Bible is John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

Some people believe that everyone is going to heaven. But that is not what the Bible says. Jesus says: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

In Acts 4:12 we read: “There is salvation in no one else [except Jesus], for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”

And this from Romans 10:9: “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

This life is NOT all there is. We have the immensity of eternity awaiting us when we die. Eternity is hard to imagine. One description I have heard is this. Imagine a block of solid granite one mile high, one mile wide and one mile deep. Now imagine one of these blocks on the north pole and one on the south pole.

Now imagine how long it would take a woodpecker to fly from one block to another. Now imagine a woodpecker giving one peck on one of those blocks of granite and then flying, flying, flying to the other and giving that one a peck. When the woodpecker had reduced each of those blocks to one cubic inch, THAT would be the first day of eternity.

I don't know about you, but I want to be with the Lord for eternity and that is why I thank God for the gift of Jesus and why Carol and I pray for our family members and others we know to find eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

3. Because Jesus was born, we have a loving relationship with God

Because Jesus was born, we are saved from our sins. Because Jesus was born, we can have eternal life with Jesus in heaven. And because Jesus was born, we can have a loving relationship with God. ...Let me tell you a story. A true story by the way.

In 1994, two Americans answered an invitation from the Russian Department of Education to teach morals and ethics (based on biblical principles) in public schools. They were invited to teach at prisons, businesses, the fire and police departments and a large orphanage. When they returned, they related the following account.

It was nearing the holidays, 1994, time for our orphans to hear, for the first time, the traditional story of Christmas. We told them about Joseph and Mary arriving in Bethlehem. Finding no room in the inn, the couple went to a stable, where the baby Jesus was born and placed in a manger. Throughout the story, the children and the orphanage staff sat in amazement as they listened. Some sat on the edges of their stools, trying to grasp every word.

Completing the story, we gave the children three small pieces of cardboard to make a crude manger. Each child was given a small paper square, cut from yellow napkins I had brought with me. No colored paper was available in the city. Following instructions, the children tore the paper and carefully laid stripes in the manger for straw. Small squares of flannel, cut from a worn-out nightgown and American lady was throwing away as she left Russia, were used for the baby's blanket. The children cut a doll-like baby from tan felt we had brought from the United States.

The orphans were busy assembling their mangers as I walked among them to see if they needed any help. All went well until I got to one table where little Misha sat. He looked about six years old and had finished his project. As I looked at the little boy's manger, I was startled to see not one, but two babies in the manger. Crossing his arms in front of him and looking at this completed manger scene, the child began to repeat the story very seriously,

For such a young boy, who had only heard the Christmas story once, he related the happenings accurately—until he came to the part where Mary put the baby Jesus in the manger. Then Misha made up his own ending to the story. He said, "And when Maria laid the baby in the manger, Jesus looked at me and asked me if I had a place to stay. I told him I have no mamma and I have no papa, so I don't have any place to stay. Then Jesus told me I could stay with him. But I told him I

couldn't, because I didn't have a gift to give him like everybody else did. But I wanted to stay with Jesus so much, so I thought about what I had that maybe I could use for a gift. I thought maybe if I kept him warm, that would be a good gift.

So I asked Jesus, "If I keep you warm, will that be a good enough gift?" And Jesus told me, "If you keep me warm, that will be the best gift anybody ever gave me." So I got into the manger, and then Jesus looked at me and told me I could stay with him—for always.

As little Misha finished his story, his eyes brimmed full of tears that splashed down his little cheeks. Putting his hands over his face, his head dropped to the table and his shoulders shook as he sobbed and sobbed. The little orphan had found someone who would never abandon him, someone who would stay with him—for always.

You don't have to be a poor orphan to have Jesus stay with you for always. Jesus says: "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me" (Revelation 3:20). All you need to do is ask; ask Jesus to come and live with you, and Jesus will. And if you do, all your sins will be forgiven, you will have a loving relationship with God and you will live with Jesus—for always.

"Away in a Manger" is one of my favorite Christmas carols. The third stanza goes:

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay
Close by me forever, and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,
And fit us for heaven, to live with us there.

If you have not asked Jesus into your heart, please do as we sing "Away in a Manger."
... #158...