

There is No Christmas Without a Baby!

Sermon for Christmas Eve

Sermon Text: Galatians 4:4-7



But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

In one of the congregations that I worked in before, there was a beautiful nativity set with an oversized ox, donkey, wisemen, shepherds, Mary and Joseph, and everything that went with it. A food bank was connected to the church so our members placed the nativity scene in the window the week before Christmas so that everyone could see it. However, special care was taken to ensure that Baby Jesus was not placed in the manger until Christmas Day. The congregation wanted to make it clear that Christmas is only celebrated once Baby Jesus has arrived. Without the Christ child, there is no Christmas! Stollen and Christmas cake is already in stores in September, but Christmas is only Christmas when Baby Jesus has arrived! St. Paul speaks of such a special time when he calls to us from Galatians: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law...” Even if Paul hadn’t celebrated Christmas with a cow and donkey, everything revolves around the Child for him. He opens the Old Testament and finds God’s plan in it, which comes to fruition through this Child. Paul lets us know that this Child must be at the center. So, who do we find in the manger? And who is this child that was born among poor people in Palestine? Why is it so important that we now classify years with *anno Domini*, after His birth?

Nothing extraordinary happens there in the stable at first. It is the most natural of all events: the birth of a person. However, what seems natural and normal to us is by no means normal because Jesus’ birth does not mean that His life started there. No, on the contrary! He left life there. He left His true identity and essence in God. He was brought into this world with much exertion from His mother, He had to learn and grow, He became tired, sick, and had achy feet. Above all else, He could be hurt here on earth, hurt not only with ugly words, but also with actions. Grief and fear would take hold of Him. He was handed over to evil people. And He did all of this voluntarily so that we could become children of God. The solemn words the apostle Paul uses in Galatians are reminiscent of a contract. He says that God sent His Son not so that we can have a new way to establish dates and times, but that the contract that God makes with us has nothing else in mind than that we may be called His children.

Yes, this really is the surprise at Christmas. It’s all about the Child! But the Child is not just the Baby Jesus. The child is you! The special thing about being a child is that you may know: “I belong to my parents. I am a part of them!” As a child, you can count on your parents to embrace you, love you, and protect you. So that is Christmas. It’s not our idea and definitely not our right, but God’s gift to us. And this gift is that we are allowed to be children. God the Father says to you on Christmas Day: “I am your Father! You can talk to Me as a child talks to his father.” Perhaps this all seems unnatural to you, and you ask: “How am I supposed to talk to God? Only crazy people do that!” If you ask this question, you are right on the one hand. It is unnatural to talk with God and it doesn’t really fit in with our nature! But nothing is normal at Christmas! The God of the universe makes Himself small and is born in a manger. That is anything but normal. But that’s exactly what God wants. He wants the extraordinary to grow in our lives. He wants the unnatural to become normal for us. He wants you to lie in the arms of the heavenly Father and be a child. The most natural thing that children do is to talk to their parents. They say: “Abba, Father!” Perhaps this Christmas season is a good opportunity to try this again. Paul describes this in the easiest terms, a simple call: “Abba, Father!” Have you forgotten to pray? Or do you feel that your prayers have become dry and lifeless? Or have you never tried to pray? Maybe Christmas is just the right moment for us to do all of this. We can be a child and cry out: “Abba, Father!” Amen.