

December 21, 2003
Advent 4

"The Christmas Story According to Jesus"

HEBREWS 10:5-10

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; ⁶ with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. ⁷ Then I said, 'Here I am-- it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.'" ⁸ First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). ⁹ Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

I believe that I am safe in saying that you will not pass through this Christmas season without hearing a reading of the Christmas story according to Luke with its familiar words, "And it came to pass..." In addition to Luke there is the Christmas story according to Matthew where an angel appears to Joseph and tells him that he should not be afraid to get married to Mary for "that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." Then there are the stirring words that begin the gospel of John. "In the beginning was the Word... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..."

We know these Christmas stories or Christmas accounts so well, like the back of our hand, we might say. But how well do you know the Christmas story according to Jesus? What if you could be a reporter and interview Jesus and ask him what it was like for him to reach that moment of time when he would break into this world and become fully human, with our flesh and blood and bones and hair, and still remain Lord and God of the universe? This morning almost with bated breath and eager anticipation we want to listen to this **Christmas Story According to Jesus**. This is recorded for us initially in the words of Psalm 40, and then quoted in the book of Hebrews, the verses just read to you. I pray that these words of Jesus will come to mean as much to you as they have meant for me.

1) Listen to Jesus tell his story

When we listen to Jesus tell his thoughts and feelings of coming into our world, we easily sense a thrill and excitement about the work that he was about to do for us. Hebrews began this amazing interview with the words, "Therefore when Jesus came into the world.." Let's stop right there and ponder these words. "Therefore when Jesus came into the world." Jesus did just take on the form of a tiny baby or a child growing up in Nazareth as the carpenters' son. He came into our world as one of us, with one of our bodies. "The word became flesh and dwelt among us..." That's the mystery of Jesus' birth that never ceases to astound us and amaze us.

Remember that song a few years ago that said, "What if God were one of us, a slob like one of us." We are slobs by the way we treat each other in homes and in our community. Jesus was not such a slob like one of us. He was tempted in all parts as we are, yet without

sin. His body was subject to the flu and other diseases. He felt pain, sorrow, hunger and thirst, but was not the slob that we are because of our sin. What makes the pictures of Saddam so unnerving, not the ones with the disheveled beard, but the mug shot of him clean shaven? He looks like one of us. He could be anyone's grandfather. We all follow the sin-filled footsteps of our ancestor Adam, except for Jesus who was fully human, yet without sin.

A few years ago a reporter in New York did an article on the homeless people. She dressed up as a bag lady and lived that way for several weeks, just to see how people treated her. Jesus came down to this earth and he knows what we feel. The book of Hebrews tells us that we "do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses." As we sing in the hymn, "Jesus knows our every weakness." He became one of us.

Jesus had a much higher purpose for coming into this world. Listen in to this amazing conversation that took place between Jesus and his heavenly Father in the hallowed halls of eternity. "Sacrifice and burnt offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me, with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased." Jesus is speaking to his Father and saying, "Dear Father, I know that you do not want me to offer sacrifices the way priests offering the blood and bodies of thousands of animals throughout the Old Testament." Those sacrifices pictured the sacrifice Jesus made. The time had come to throw away the pictures and actually be the sacrifice the Father that had planned from eternity.

If you look back into the book of Psalms where this quote comes from, it does not read the same. It actually says, "Sacrifices and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced." Instead of a body prepared for me, it says, "but my ears you have pierced." The book of Hebrews is quoting from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, where the concept of piercing the ears was translated as body prepared. Perhaps those translators wanted people to know the Old Testament custom of claiming the body of a voluntary slave by piercing his ear. If I were very poor and wanted security for my family, I might talk to a rich person and ask if I can be their voluntary slave, even for life, if necessary. In return I would receive a home and food for my family. To symbolize my willingness to serve I would place my ear lobe on the door of my master's house and he would pierce it with an awl. The ring I wore in my ear said, "My body belongs to you." Jesus joyfully told his Father, "My body belongs to you and I am willing to offer it up as a sacrifice for the sin of the world." And Jesus spoke these words joyfully. In fact in the book of Hebrews it actually says, "For the joy set before Jesus endured the cross and the shame."

How did Jesus feel about coming into this world? Don't you get a little tired of questions that focus on feelings? "How do you feel about losing your home in fire?" asks the reporter. But with Jesus we want to know how he felt about coming to this world. Listen to how Jesus felt about this. He speaks to the Father and says, "Here I am- it is written about me in the scroll- I have come to do your will O God." Think back to a time when your mom or dad asked you to help with the dishes or carry out the garbage. Did you always have the joy in your voice that said, "Sure mom, I'd love to help you with dishes?" Or did you say, "It's not my turn?" Jesus willingly and joyfully jumped at the chance to do his Father's will. What if you were going in for major surgery and in your visit to the doctor, he is complaining to you about how much he does not like his work, and he cannot wait to

retire, and the last thing he feels like doing is operating on people. If that were my doctor, "I would say, doc, give me my clothes, I am out of here." When you have a worker who complains every day about their job, you know they are not going to be doing good work. Jesus thrilled to the opportunity of doing the Father's will and doing it perfectly.

Oh, did you catch what Jesus said about his work written in scrolls? The Old Testament scrolls predicted the place of Jesus' birth. These scrolls gave names for Jesus such as "Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." They even predicted Jesus would be born of a virgin. They also predicted the pain and suffering Jesus would endure for our sin in the most graphic detail, 700 years before it happened. In the scroll of Isaiah it even said he would be "stricken, smitten and afflicted by the heavenly Father for our sin." Jesus joyfully proclaimed, "Here I am. I ready to the job and carry out my assignment." One day Jesus told some people, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as ransom for many." I do not envision Jesus ever saying this words without conviction and even a smile on his face.

In the Lord's Prayer we pray the words, "Thy will be done." How do you pray these words? Do you say them as if you had just eaten a lemon, with a sour expression on your face that winces at the thought of waking up each day and trying to do the Father's will? Or do you say it with joy and enthusiasm and excitement? As we come to the end of another year, we are all too painfully aware of how far we fall short of God's glory in the way we go about our tasks for the Lord without a smile, without joy in our lives, a song in the heart and a spring in the step. Jesus was not that way. In this amazing Christmas story according to Jesus we hear him thrill to opportunity to become one of us, and even offer his body as the perfect sacrifice to atone and pay for the messes we make of our lives.

2) Listen to what this means for us

We have listened to Jesus tell us how he joyfully answered the Father's request to come into this world and save us. What does his answer mean for your life and mine this morning? Our text tells us when Jesus talked about a body the Father prepared for him, and doing the Father's will, "he set aside the first to establish the second." Jesus came to let the Jewish people know that they would no longer have to provide graphic images of animals being slaughtered and burnt on altars to picture his work of saving people. He came to our world and fulfilled in gory detail what these images pictured. He set aside the first to establish the second. A tiny baby lying in a manger was destined to be stricken, smitten and afflicted for our sin by his own heavenly Father, and he was not ashamed of carrying out that task that no one else could do.

Jesus joyfully carried out the plan of his heavenly Father. Our text says "And by that will we have made holy through the sacrifice for the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Just think of it. We have been made holy and acceptable to God, not by anything in our will, but entirely by what Jesus willed and desired for us. He wanted to give his body as sacrifice for our sin once for all. With what he wanted for us we can be sure of complete pardon and cleansing for all sin.

All religions of the world without exception teach that you can make yourself worthy and acceptable to some god or higher being by what you can accomplish with your will and

your determination. How frustrating that is because you know that you will never do enough. You might compare it to shopping. You spend hours searching for the right gift for someone you love and never get what your desire. If being accepted by a holy and perfect God depends on how well I perform, and how well I follow my desires, then I am hopelessly lost. However, if my salvation and my standing before God depends on what Jesus desired and what he expressed here in this Christmas story according to Jesus, then I have hope. "And by that will (that desire, that determination on the part of Jesus) we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

The next time you read the Christmas story according to Luke, think of taking a little more time and read this Christmas story according to Jesus. Listen to him tell you how determined he is to enter our world and offer his body as the perfect sacrifice for our sin. And let these words simply overwhelm you with his love. Amen.