

Title: A Life Enriched

Theme: A Birth Party

Focal Scripture: Isaiah 9:6

Resource: “Rev. Dr. Gordon Steinke from 2012 Christ Birthday Observance”

Date: December 16, 2012

Place: DCOG

Big Idea: What would be different if Christ was never born?

One of the old Christmas classic movies is the Jimmy Stewart favorite, “It’s a Wonderful Life”. The theme has been reworked for numerous stories and movies. The idea is that if we could see how the world would turn out without us that we would grasp on to our current circumstances and give thanks to the Lord.

Stop and think about it.

What would be different if you had never been born?

1. Debbie would be married to someone else. Probably in misery! Or maybe she would have entered a convent discontented with all the other men she knew.
2. My girls would not have been born.
3. She probably would not have had the opportunity to become a Pittsburgh Steeler fan.
4. She might still be living in Houston, Texas instead of the booming Decatur, Indiana.

A birthday is a big thing – because every birth has changed the course of history and our lives?

Imagine some of the ways in which history would be different without the birth of Jesus.

1. Our calendar: I'm sure that a calendar would have been developed but it would have been designed differently. There would be no Before Christ and no Anno Domini (in the year of the Lord). Some modernists use a different nomenclature like CE for the Common Era and BCE for Before the Common Era. Still, the point up to the birth of Christ seems to be the dividing point in the use of the Julian and the Gregorian calendars.

Without Christ's birth what is that we will measure time against? How about when Carthage fell to the Romans? Or maybe we could measure time by the victories and losses of the Ostergoths and the Visagoths?

Or maybe we would just choose to use the Mayan Calendar. According to the alarmists, we are all supposed to die this week anyway.

2. Without the birth of Christ there would have been no Apostle Paul. True, Saul would probably still been born but there would have been no Christian community for him to persecute. No Christ, no Damascus Road experience and thus no planting of Christian churches in Asia Minor/now Turkey.
3. No Jesus, no New Testament. There would have been no gospel to share. No gospel to write about and no disciples to evangelize. Who would Nero persecute? No Christian influence in the constant conflict between Jew and Muslim. No Crusades to recover Jerusalem. Why would anybody want a Jerusalem that was destroyed by the Romans in CE 70 (AD 70) or whatever year the Mayans would have called it.

No message of forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration to God. No ultimate sacrifice for our sins so we would

all still be sacrificing bulls, sheep, goats, pigeons and grain.

No Christian churches, no clergy, no one proclaiming hope for there would be no hope.

4. There would have been no Catholic Church. Constantine would have had no Christ to convert to. Maybe he would have chosen Islam. Great scientists and inventors would have found a different source of inspiration. The artists would have chosen different subjects. Our world would look very different today.
5. No Catholic church: no Martin Luther and no Protestant church. Martin and John Calvin would have had to find a different inspiration. If they were even able to exist in their day.
6. It would have changed the structures of nations. The great World Wars would have been other nations fighting for other causes. Instead of countries like Germany and France the great wars may have involved countries like Ethiopia and Slovakia. There may not have been a Hitler but there are always little men who seek to dominate the world and control others around them. Socialism would probably exist but we might call it a different name. Nevertheless it would still be an abomination.
7. There would not be a Church of God and probably not a congregation worshipping on this location. John Wesley would not have experienced that warming of God's Spirit that he called sanctification. Thus D.S. Warner of our Church of God history would not have stepped out of denominationalism calling people forth to salvation, sanctification, holiness, and unity.

8. We might still believe in God but our structure and practice would be much different than it is today. Would we be Jewish? Maybe...but I think not. Would we be Church of God...again, I think not.
9. I probably would not be standing here as your pastor and you probably wouldn't be here either. This building would probably be an auto parts store or a tattoo parlor. Maybe the hospital would own the land and put up a water therapy unit here.
10. I'm wondering where I would be. My family might have still moved to the Youngstown area for work in the Steel Mills. I might have attended Youngstown State University and earned a teaching degree and tried to get into coaching of some kind. Maybe become a famous basketball coach.

Every birth has changed the course of history.

Isaiah 9:6

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Consider how God can and wants to be a part of our lives.

We live in a nation that highly values its government and the process used to keep that government functioning. I know that there are many times when we doubt the presence of God in our government leadership and I am by no means seeking to proclaim to you a leadership system that is God-inspired and God-displayed.

What I am saying to us is that the government will be on his shoulders. Not the government of the United States

but the government by which the entire world will be held accountable.

Isaiah was seeking to offer hope to the people of Israel as they looked for a king. The verse still gives us hope. It is a hope for a presence that is even greater than a king. What did we receive in Jesus Christ?

1. A Wonderful Counselor...God is our Counselor who defines and invites us to a truly full life.
2. A Mighty God...more powerful than all the evil/struggle around us.
3. Everlasting Father - this is about identity and belonging...God gives us our identity and calls us his children.
4. Prince of Peace – this is about security and well-being...today, God offers us rest and hope.

* At the end of his sermon on Isaiah 9:6, Ken Langley, pastor of Christ Community Church in Zion, Illinois, shared this powerful thought about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, juxtaposed with the story of Aragorn in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Return of the King*, the final book in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy:

The emotional power of (Isaiah 9:6) lies not only in the Messiah's titles, but in their cumulative effect. They are more than their sum. Spoken together...they convey a sense of majesty that can't be captured by any one title, no matter how lofty.

Tolkien's *The Return of the King* has a scene that illustrates well what I'm talking about. Aragorn, the rightful king of the west, has long labored in obscurity, forgoing kingly comforts to serve his subjects and fight their battles, repeatedly risking his life for them. At last he prevails over the forces of the dark lord, and is poised to enter the city where he will rule at last.

When Aragorn enters the fortified city of Minas Tirith for the first time as king, the city's steward proclaims Aragorn's royal pedigree for all the citizens to hear: "Here is Aragorn son of Arathorn, chieftain of the Dunedain of Arnor, Captain of the Host of the West, bearer of the Star of the North, wielder of the Sword Reforged, victorious in battle, whose hands bring healing, the Elfstone, Elessar of the line of Valandil, Isildur's son, Elendil's son of Numenor. Shall he be king and enter into the City and dwell there?"

There was another King who long labored in obscurity: unheralded, humbly serving the people over whom he had every right to reign, laying down his life for them. Today he claims the throne of our lives. Here is Jesus the Christ, the Second Adam, the Bright and Morning Star, the First and the Last, victorious in battle, whose hands bring healing, Mighty Second Person of the Trinity, Son of David, Son of Man, Word of God Incarnate, the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Shall he enter our hearts—our church—and dwell there?

Application: This Birth Party, this Christmas – is about who God is and how God can enrich our lives! If we accept in faith and surrender our lives...this birth has the very real potential of changing us! Don't just celebrate Christmas...experience Christ – the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace!