

## Advent 2011 Part 2

### He Will Save His People From Their Sins

We come to the second Sunday of Advent. Let me remind you that Advent is to be a time of spiritual examination and reflection, a time of soul searching and repentance as we prepare our hearts in anticipation of the coming of the Lord, both his birth and his second coming. We will be receiving communion at the close of the service and the Scriptures tell us to prepare our hearts, to examine ourselves as we come to the Lord's table as well, so indeed this is a morning for examining and preparing our hearts for an anticipated encounter with the Lord.

I have been meditating on a passage of Scripture found in Matthew's gospel. You know the story from the gospel of Luke and the gospel of Matthew: Mary was engaged to Joseph but still a virgin when the angel appeared to her and told her she would conceive a child by the Holy Spirit and she was to call his name Jesus.

Matthew's gospel tells us when Joseph heard that Mary was pregnant, being a righteous man, he looked for a way to end the engagement, not wanting to accuse her and publicly disgrace her. But an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to go ahead and take Mary as his wife, that she had not been unfaithful to him but that indeed she had conceived this child by the Holy Spirit. The angel then told Joseph, **"She will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."** **Matthew 1:21**

Jesus is the Greek version of the Hebrew name Joshua (Yeshua), which means the Lord saves. His name would reflect what he had come to do. He came to save. But what did that mean for first century Israel and what does it mean for us today?

Take a look with me for just a moment at the circumstances surrounding first century Israel. Israel was kind of a nation-state, ruled over and occupied by the Romans. Before that it had been occupied by the Greeks and before that it had been occupied by the Persians and before that the Babylonians. At the time of Jesus much of the land was owned by foreigners who controlled huge estates. (In Oklahoma we would be talking about share-croppers.) The farmers in Israel were often treated unfairly, having to rent land to farm and the profits going to the land-owners -- land that should have been their own! The poor, the common folks were especially mistreated and pushed to the outer edges of their society. The Romans were cruel in their oppression, and then you had the despot Herod who ruled the nation with the permission and

approval of Rome. You recall it was Caesar who said he would rather be Herod's pig than his relative because of Herod's paranoia having his own family members put to death.

What I'm telling you is that first century Israel was a difficult place to live - a land in need of liberation, in need of a Savior. And when you tell people that a Savior is coming, after all of these centuries of oppression, imagine the response. Israel had been waiting, expecting, believing for the words of the prophets to come true. It was on their lips and in their prayers everyday. It was their hope and their expectation that Messiah would come, a Savior.

Isaiah prophesied of that hope in Isaiah 49, telling of a day of salvation when the Lord would restore the land to them. He said in that day the enemies of Israel would **"...bow down before you with their faces to the ground; they will lick the dust at your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord, those who hope in me will not be disappointed....I will contend with those who contend with you and your children I will save. I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh; they will be drunk on their own blood, as with wine. Then all mankind will know that I, the Lord am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."** **Isaiah 49:23-26**

When Israel hears that a Savior is coming, they know what that means. They've defined salvation by the words of their prophets. Hear it celebrated at the beginning of the New Testament, as Zechariah offers praise when his son, John the Baptist is born. (Luke 1:68-75)

Jesus had come to be a Savior and Israel knew exactly what to expect. He was to be Messiah, prophet and king and he would save them from the sinful oppression of their enemies and from all those who mistreated them. That's why Zechariah sang as he did. So when Joseph and Mary heard the words of the angel, they must have had that same expectation. When Jesus comes, when he grows up, everything will change. He will lead a revolution that will liberate us and save us from our oppressors. It's what everyone thought. Let me show you something.

We all know when Jesus was born. According to Luke 2 "a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed." "This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria." Something else happened around this time. Look with me at Acts 5:33-39.

Gamaliel was a great teacher of the law and he saw Jesus in the same light as everyone else. He was one of these fellows who thought he could lead a revolt, gather a few followers and

try to save Israel from their oppressors. Theudas had tried and failed and then about the time of the first census, around the time Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Judas the Galilean led a revolt and he too was killed. Now this Jesus from Galilee has given it a try and he too has been killed. They all tried to save Israel and they all failed. But Gamaliel didn't understand what Jesus had come to do.

Notice what the angel told Joseph. You will call his name Jesus because he will save his people, from their sins! It wasn't to liberate them from cruel dictators or unjust government policy, it wasn't to save them from bad days and a brutal existence, although all of that would be important. Jesus came to save them from something even more sinister than their oppressors. He came to set them free from darker forces than those of Herod or Pilate. Jesus came to save them from their own sins!

You need to understand that when you start talking to an oppressed people about their sins, they immediately become defensive. The people feel, whatever their sins might be, they are minuscule compared to the sins of the oppressors. "You're going to tell me I need to repent and be saved? Look at how I'm living. Look at how I'm being treated. I may have done a few things wrong, but it's nothing compared to the evil being done to me. They are the ones who need to repent. I need to be saved from them."

Nothing has changed in all of history. We still do the same thing. Everyone in our society and culture does the same. "I need some one to save me from all the unfair things that happen to me. I need someone to make right all the injustice I see. But don't start talking to me about my sins. My sins aren't anything compared to the sins of the oppressors."

Go talk to the Occupy Tulsa, New York, Seattle, Wall Street folks. They are marching to tell everyone how we need to be saved from the rich and evil corporate world. I don't doubt the injustice they are pointing to and some of the inequities, but start talking to them about their need for a savior themselves and they won't want to hear that. "Corporate greed and executives with multi-million dollar bonuses while we don't have jobs or healthcare, that's just not right." "Yes, but what about the fact that you are cheating on your spouse and lying or you won't pay your child support?" "Well, that's nothing compared to...."

We all appreciate the need for a Savior but we don't want to admit our sinfulness. We are just like Israel when Jesus was born. We see the need for a Savior to deliver us out of the

mess we are in, but don't make it personal. America needs a Savior cause look at all the drugs and violence and sinners out there. But don't start pointing out my sins and shortcomings. This is the truth the angel was explaining to Joseph. **A Savior for sinners is a Savior for all of us, not just for some of us.** The bible tells us that all of us have sinned and missed the mark. We've all fallen short of God's glory, God's righteousness, God's standards of holiness. You will call his name Jesus, Savior, because he will save his people, that's all of us sinners, from our sins. Our sins. Not corporate sins. Not their sins. Not everybody else's sins. It's personal. It's my sins. He has come to save me from my sinfulness. That's the good news of this Savior.

Advent is a time of preparation. It is time for us to stop hiding behind corporate sins, pointing a finger at others, assigning blame. It's time to stop hiding behind our self-righteousness and to be honest with God and with ourselves. We are still trying to defend ourselves, making ourselves righteous by comparing our selves with others. "At least I'm not that bad. At least I'm more righteous than those hypocrites over there." It's time to admit the truth about ourselves. The bible says "There is no one righteous, not even one." Romans 3:10

The story is told of G.K.Chesterton, a great author and essayist of another century. In response to a London newspaper that asked for letters to the editor describing what was wrong with the world, Chesterton wrote this letter. "Dear Editor: I am. Sincerely, G.K. Chesterton." Chesterton knew the truth. What's wrong with the world? I am. Who needs salvation? I do.

Remember the two thieves that were crucified alongside Jesus? Luke tells us, **"One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!'" Luke 23:39**

Do you hear what he is saying? "I don't deserve this! We don't deserve this. Aren't you the Messiah, the Christ? If so, aren't you supposed to be saving us from Roman oppression like this? Isn't this what you came to do? Save us because we don't deserve this!"

I think that is the voice and reason of much of our culture and society. "We don't deserve this! You can't send us to hell because we aren't that bad. So what if we ignored all your commandments and so what if we ignored your plan of salvation and your call to repentance, but we don't deserve this. You have to save us. Aren't you the Messiah? It doesn't matter how we're living our life, or our conduct or decisions. Get us out of here. Save us."

But hear the words of the other criminal crucified with Jesus. **"Don't you fear God...?"**

**We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:40-43**

Advent is a time of preparation for the birth of the one who came to save sinners. The way to prepare for his birth is for all of us to admit the truth about ourselves: I am a sinner and I need a Savior. Stop trying to defend yourself, to justify yourself by comparing yourself to others. You won't be judged by your own standards or by anyone else's. You will be judged by the only Judge of the Universe, by God himself and by his righteous judgement, we all stand condemned.. The only way for you to be saved, to have your sins forgiven and taken away is to repent of those sins, to acknowledge that you can't save yourself and ask Jesus to forgive you and save you and change you from the inside out. The bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Call on him. Ask him to save you. To forgive you. To give you new life. Ask him to remember you, like the crucified criminal did. “Remember me. Wash me clean in the flood of your saving grace. Save me Jesus.” It's what he has come to do for all of us. **“You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”**

Are you willing to admit the truth about yourself and your need for a Savior. You can't ever be good enough to earn forgiveness, to earn a place in heaven. Only through faith in Christ, only by means of his forgiveness and grace can any of us be saved. Call upon him today.

We are going to serve communion this morning. Those who are going to help us serve if you will come forward.

### *The Broken Heart*

*O Lord, No day of my life has passed that has not proved me guilty in thy sight. Prayers have been uttered from a prayerless heart; Praise has been often praiseless sound; My best services are filthy rags. Blessed Jesus, let me find a covert in thy appeasing wounds.*

*Though my sins rise to heaven thy merits soar above them;*

*Though unrighteousness weighs me down to hell, thy righteousness exalts me to thy throne.*

*All things in me call for my rejection, All things in thee plead my acceptance.*

*I appeal from the throne of perfect justice to thy throne of boundless grace,*

*Grant me to hear thy voice assuring me: that by thy stripes I am healed, that thou wast bruised for my iniquities, that thou hast been made sin for me that I might be righteous in thee, that my grievous sins, my manifold sins, are all forgiven, buried in the ocean of thy concealing blood.*

*I am guilty, but pardoned, lost but saved, wandering, but found, sinning, but cleansed.  
Give me perpetual broken-heartedness,  
Keep me always clinging to thy cross,,  
Flood me every moment with descending grace,  
Open to me the springs of divine knowledge, sparkling like crystal, flowing clear and unsullied through my wilderness of life.*

*...taken from The Valley of Vision*

*A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*

The words of the Anglican Communion service includes this prayer, prayed on behalf of all who would receive communion. The words express my heart so well as I come to this sacred table. “We do not presume to come to this thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table. But thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy: Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he is us. Amen.”

Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you and feed on him in your heart by faith, with thanksgiving.

Drink this in remembrance that Christ’s blood was shed for you and be thankful.