

17. The Difference That Made a Difference

It hardly seems possible that it should be Christmas-time already! When parents have a new baby, for some reason they believe their baby is going to be different from any other baby. But once there was a baby born who really was different - very different from all others. His parents didn't even choose His name. God did. Through an angel His name was announced to be JESUS. Jesus means Savior, for He would save people from their sins.

This baby's *birth* was different. His birth was announced centuries before He was born. Many people thought He would be born amid wealth, and of persons of high social standing. Not so. He was born in a stable because "there was no room for them in the inn."

Oh, yes, His *birth* was really different. He was born without a human father. His father was God Himself. He was and is God's own Son. His mother was a human being with a very common name, Mary. Jesus was, then, born as God and man, the God-Man. He was conceived and born without sin....not for Himself...but for the salvation of all people. It had been foretold, "Unto US a Child is born, unto US a Son is given." The angels announced it: "Unto YOU is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord." Indeed, His birth was different - really different.

And, of course, His *life* was also different from the ordinary. This baby grew to manhood. Other people fought, hated, argued, cheated, and deceived because they were born in sin. Not so the Savior, Christ the Lord. He obeyed, loved, helped, taught, gave and forgave. His life was different. He performed numerous miracles - not in another's, but in His own power. Most astonishing of all, He lived to keep the commandments for us. His life was, to say the least, radically different.

Not only this baby - His birth and His life, but also His *death* was different. Oh, yes, He died. He really died. He was put to death - crucified. Because He did good, people hated Him. The Bible tells us why they hated Him: "Because THEIR deeds were evil." Because He was Light and "men loved darkness rather than light" they got rid of Him - at least for a while. Men put Him to death on a cross. They hated His goodness because they were evil. They hated Him so much that they put Him to death by crucifixion. And yet, He did not die because He had to, but because He wanted to. You see, He came into this world, "to seek and to save that which was lost", and this could only be accomplished through His suffering and death on the cross. And so He willingly, lovingly paid the supreme sacrifice. He paid the wages of sin - death. "Upon Him was laid the iniquity of us all." For all mankind He died; for all people of all time - and for you and for me. His death was different. Not infrequently men die cringing, cursing, blaming, begging. Jesus died as He had lived - loving, giving and forgiving.

Up to this point all of this makes little more than an interesting, touching story. But thank God there is more! The Christ of Christmas is different also in that He *rose* from the dead! Babies are born. Some grow to maturity, but all eventually die. Here was a baby that was different. How and why could He rise again? Because He was different. He was and is the one, eternal God "Whom earth and heaven adore." The Bible teaches that it was "not possible for Him to be held by death." He had power to take up His life again. On the third day He did just that; He rose from the grave - alive! He lives! Our Jesus, the Christ of Christmas, *lives!* The cradle, the cross and the tomb - all are empty.

And to all who believe in Him He promises: "Because I live you shall live also." Oh, yes, "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The Difference That Made a Difference

We Begin

L: L: Unto us a Child is born. Unto us a Son is given.
G: O come, let us worship Him.

We Search Scriptures - Isaiah 53:3-7,9-10

Leader (L) and Two Groups (1) and (2)

- L: He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
- 1: Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.
- 2: But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.
- L: We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
- 1: He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.
- 2: He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.
- L: Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

Parents think, "Our baby will be different."

Jesus really was different:

- √ In His unique birth
- √ In His perfect life
- √ In His loving death
- √ In His powerful resurrection

We Respond

- L: Knowing You by faith, Lord, we rejoice in the excitement of the first Christmas.
- 1: We share the joy of Mary, your mother
- 2: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."
- 1: We share the joy of the angels:
- 2: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."
- 1: We share the joy of the shepherds:
- 2: The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for the things they had heard and seen.
- 1: We share the joy of Simeon:
- 2: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."

We Pray

We praise You, dear Jesus, for coming down as one of us, same but different. We thank You for living, dying, and rising as our Savior from sin. As we celebrate Your birth, give us renewed joy in having You as the Christmas gift that keeps on giving, and Who keeps us living - forever!
Amen.

