

“The Miracle Birth”
By Chris Ulrich
Sunday, December 22nd, 2013

Thank you to everyone who braved the elements and made it here safely this morning. I have to admit, I was a little skeptical when I first got up, and I was thinking, “Am I going to get a text? Am I going to get a text, or a phone call?” Everybody made it here safely, thank God; it’s good to see everybody this morning.

So, it’s the time of year—we’ve had a number of messages, and, obviously, a number of songs this morning... I know Parrish started out the first week, and he titled it, “For Unto Us A Child is Born” and he talked about how God will always keep His promises. I know the second week—and I know the youth are here this morning, and you guys gave a great presentation, I think it was a real nice visual: chains that were wrapped around and all different colors about breaking the chains of bondage that hold us captive. Bob Heirtzler, are you here? No? He didn’t brave the elements? Okay. He preached last week about some of the memories he had of Christmas, and some of the times of seeking. I know that, for myself, I’ve got a couple that I just want to mention: This is something that actually comes from before coming to the knowledge of the truth, and it’s something that just stands out, it stands out personally—it just carries over. Back in 1984, there was a famine—Rebecca, you can probably testify to that—but there was a group of musicians that put together an effort, and they called it, “Band Aid.” It was kind of spur of the moment, it was designed to “Let’s just raise awareness. Let’s do something,” and they sang a song called, “Do They Know It’s Christmas?” Does anybody remember that? It was—maybe not a traditional, but it was one of those that really stood out, and it was at a time in my life that it got me interested, got me seeking. But, I would say that the first year that I actually knew Christ, that I had been baptized in His name, and it was one of those things where everything just made perfect sense. You don’t just all of the sudden know everything, but you get an understanding, this is what it’s all about, this is that love of God that we’re talking about. It’s something that’s memorable, but I really want to say that I enjoyed the music this morning. How many really enjoyed the music this morning? How many really enjoyed the music?

I’ve got to say this, too: (some may like it, some may not) there’s a coach in the NFL, and they were doing an interview last week, and they asked him, “What’s your favorite Christmas song?” He was like, really grinning, you know, and he said, “Well, I pretty much like all of them.” He’s got a reputation as a stern, maybe a stick-in-the-mud, some might think, but I appreciate that. He said it with real sincerity. It was something that stood out, you know, it’s good to see. We celebrate this time of year, but it’s something throughout the year—as Christians, who knows what day it was; whether it was December 25th, or June 18th, or September 5th; it doesn’t really matter—the fact is that He was born. I also, Bob, and I know you’re not here, again, I do appreciate his Charlie Brown references, as far as the Charlie Brown Christmas... We were at the Orelup’s Wednesday night, and Kirk was a little under the weather earlier in the week, so, on short notice, he was like, “Could you put something together?” I said, “Sure,” but I’m like, “Aw, man, don’t do this to me!” I thought about it, and I was like, “You know what? we’ll have a little surprise: we’ll watch, ‘A Charlie Brown Christmas.’ I’ve got to say, Jailed, when she saw Snoopy dancing on top of the piano, she really burst out in laughter. Some of you have seen it, some of you haven’t...”

Isaiah 7:14-15 *Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.*

I know a lot of us have probably read this verse, over and over again. There's a lot to be said—and I can't put enough emphasis on the importance of this verse and not just because I said, or anybody else says it. When you look at that like a birth, by a virgin; never before in history had it been recorded that that had happened. I've got to say that, I get online now and then, like everybody, I suppose, and there are blogs and articles and things. I came across this one earlier this week, and I was kind of scratching my head, and, basically, what it was, there are these claims that these women are making, that the actual statistics are one in two hundred claim that they have had a divine, virgin pregnancy. I thought, "I doubt it." I really do. Then I got to thinking, "Okay, what if it's really true? What if it really happened?" Okay, are you bringing forth the birth of a savior? Because that's the difference. Even if that's true, which I, you know, I downplay it; we live in an age of embellishment, exaggeration, reality TV shows, and all this other stuff. You get the impression that they're trying to outdo the next story, "Oh, you went to the moon? Well, I went to Mars." Okay, okay. "Oh, I'm doing a triathlon!" "Oh, I'm doing a double triathlon!" "Oh, I'm doing a triple triathlon!" It's like, everybody's trying to pile on, like, "Oh, I outdid Malcolm!" or, "I outdid Nubia!" or "I did better than Steve Nelson!" It's like, after a while, it's like, "Okay, let's hear the truth." That's what it's going to come down to. But you look at that prophecy—I want to touch base on that again—that fulfillment of that prophecy of that virgin birth still didn't happen—and Parrish alluded to this—for another seven-hundred plus years. What I also want to say about this is that I'm sure that there were people thinking, "There's no way it could be except of God," or, they were looking at it like, "That's preposterous. There's no way in the world that could possibly happen." So, you had something that—because, there's people now-a-days that still denounce that; that still think, "No. There's no way. It never happened. I don't believe it," whether it's somebody in the media, or, somebody that--there's atheists out there—we're going to touch on that a little bit later—but what boat are we in? But then you think about these miracles, you look at like raising the dead, or, again, comparing that, the virgin birth, or the crossing of the Red Sea, where God parted the waters. There was an article, several years back, it was in the National Geographic, and I thought this was kind of hilarious, because it was like, their claim was that the Children of Israel didn't cross the Red Sea, they crossed the Reed Sea. It was like, you mean the water's only that deep? I remember asking one guy that was in the church, "well, what do you think happened to the Egyptians?" because the Bible talks about how the waters came crashing down and destroyed them. He was basically like, "Oh, well, they slipped." So, they slipped and drowned in water that was like two feet deep.

Isaiah 11:1-5 *And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth: with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.*

It would be nice to think that the birth of Christ would be quiet, peaceful, and uninterrupted. In a way, it was, I mean, I know we didn't sing it this morning, but songs like, "Away in a Manger." It evokes thoughts of tranquility and peacefulness. And God can do anything he wants, right? Basically, He's going to protect that child, which He did. Unfortunately there are just enough demonic forces to help us understand that there is a war of "light vs. darkness", of "good vs. evil" and of "God vs. the devil."

I remember seeing this movie when I was probably six or seven—it relates to Christmas—I don't remember if I turned the TV on, it was, maybe, a Saturday afternoon... I may have just wandered into the room and turned the channel on. It wasn't the "Ten Commandments;" I know that's a religious-themed movie. It stands out—maybe somebody will remember the title of it if I describe a little bit of the plot: Basically, I was watching this, alone, I mean, there was nobody else in the room, and there was this scene where they had like these camels are drawing these carts, and they're filled with children. I'm looking at this, and I can't even believe this, and they're taking them all down to the river, and they're throwing them into the river. I was thinking—and then, a couple of scenes later, they show one child, he was a young child, it was a boy; it was Christ. It was basically depicting the events, exactly how those children were slaughtered, but it was hard to fathom that there could be that much wickedness, especially when you're a young kid; you're thinking, "Is this even close to being real?" We come to find out:

***Matthew 2:16-18** Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wrath, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.*

As we can see, Christmas isn't all about toys, sleigh bells, and Christmas trees. There's nothing wrong with that, I mean, there's nothing wrong, obviously, if you celebrate it. But, you think about what would be considered an unpleasant passage, I mean, you look at something like that, and it's as much a part of the Christmas story as just getting together with friends and having a peaceful time of fellowship. Think about the parents of all those kids... This was a real event. That's one thing about the Bible is that there are things—and I'm going to get into this for a second—is that there are accounts of miracles, I think sometimes about the fishes and the loaves. It's a physical impossibility. I mean, you've got five fishes and to loaves, and you're going to feed five thousand people? Come on. The truth is, I believe it. I wasn't there, but, without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). You have to have faith and believe these things. I know there's a society filled with people that are just there like vultures, ready to leap on any kind of mistake, or any kind of seeming contradiction.

So, I was reading an article a couple weeks ago and I'm going to read now the whole thing. The title is, "[Atheists get reactionary in Daley Plaza.](#)" (from the Chicago Sun-Times.) I'm not one to just sit there and have a knee-jerk reaction every time I see something like this. "Oh, we've got to go take them out!" You know, it's not like just—I mean, God's given us, in this world, but God's given the power of this world over to Satan. That's just fact. But, I want to read this one sentence, "And in New York City, American Atheists are running a digital

billboard in Times Square asking, ‘Who needs Christ during Christmas?’” I’m reading between the lines as much as I can, and I’m thinking, “Who needs Christ in Christmas?” Well, I’m going to say this for all of you NFL fans out there, that’s like taking the Football out of the NFL. It’s like taking the cars out of General Motors. There’s nothing! That’s like taking computers out of Microsoft! Taking Christ out of Christmas? It’s ridiculous. It’s like, well, sometimes I wonder why atheists want to get more notice this time of year? I know that here’s those of us here in this room that had an atheist belief at one time. The change has been, if you want to be so contrary, why don’t you try it in June? I mean, that’s the exact opposite time of year—that’s the summer solstice? It’s not a matter of looking at it like—Satan tries to mimic Christ in as many ways as possible. Biblically, God gave the lesser light to rule the darkness. That’s what Satan has power over, but we have a hope in this world, that’s something—we have the power of God. I know this isn’t going to be a long message—I know that the children are all here, too.

Every year we hear about the war on Christmas, and it’s true. There is a war on Christmas and it’s relentless, but it’s been going on since the birth of Christ. We hear about decaying morals, and that’s true, too. Generally speaking, morals are in decline. We hear about the end of the world, and the thing that gets me about that is sometimes you hear people talking about the end of the world, and people say, “Oh, yeah, it’s going to happen on this time…” and it’s like, we know that the Bible says that no man knows the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man will come (Matthew 24:36/Matthew 25:13), so, it’s like, you just throw that out the window. But, even so, if somebody did know, what are you going to do, when that day comes, without Christ? I know Who the answer is. Someday this world will end and it won’t be pretty for those who have rejected Christ. But in the midst of all the crookedness, corruption, sorrow, and tragedy I’d like to ask what’s gotten better? Has our faith in God strengthened? Has our resolve in God gotten stronger? I’ve got to say that my life is far better than it was before I knew Christ. I think that’s part of the message that we have to take is that, if people think, “Oh, you have to give so much up!” Not really. I mean, when I look at it like, “Okay, if God’s the creator, and God’s got rules and standards, the promise is that our lives will be better. If you look at—I’m not going to go to it, but I just want to allude to it—in Deuteronomy 28, it talks about if you serve God, then you’re going to receive all of these blessings, but if you don’t then these curses—I mean, it goes down to lengthy, lengthy detail. I remember something you mentioned last time you were up here, Jim Ottoson, about never giving up, and you’ve been in the faith over forty years. That’s something that really stood out with me, and I used that the following week and compared it—there was a speech—some of you remember this—Jim Valvano, he was a coach at North Carolina State, back in the 90’s—he actually had a severe form of cancer, and he was giving a speech—it actually was very spontaneous—they asked him, and he said, “Just don’t give up. Don’t ever give up.” It’s sad to say, he passed away, not too long after that, but Jim Ottoson is still here. I look at that like—you know, I crossed a milestone this year for my own life, and I look at it like, I hear those words—and not just from Jim, there’s others, there’s been plenty of others, and, you know, there’s people that have encouraged me that have only been in the faith a few months or a few years. It’s good to see, it’s good to see when people take it seriously. It’s like they’re getting something from it personally—it’s not just getting out there and converting people. I look at it like, yes, I want to see as many people saved, but I also look at it like, we’ve got to save ourselves from this untoward generation. I want to read one last verse, here. But, again, I want to ask the question, are we getting stronger in God? Do we feel a stronger resolve? I’m not talking about just some religion, I’m talking about a personal walk with God that we have a Savior. We have something where—there’s an Old Testament verse

where it talks about the House of Saul and the House of David and it says that the House of Saul waxed weaker and weaker, but the House of David waxed stronger and stronger (2 Samuel 3:1). I think about that at times, because I feel like, yeah, there's times that we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). We've all had struggles and difficulties and temptations and just go on and on. When I look at it like, "In the big picture, am I growing stronger in God? Am I being more authentic or less?" You know that was the theme of last month.

Revelation 22:14-17 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie. I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

What it really comes down to is, anybody that's willing, and looking at it like, "Are other people?" I want to be compelling; Christ said to compel them, but we can't be forceful. We don't want to be pushy. There's a passage in Matthew, when Christ rebuked the Pharisees, He talked about, "...ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." It's like, you're just trying to convert people. It's like the Crusades. I mean, that's a sad legacy. Rob Severance and I were talking about that, I think. Those weren't Christians that were doing that. Revisionist historians might write and say, "Those were Christians. Hitler was a Christian." It's ridiculous, but anytime they want to meet their agenda and label it, to smear Christianity. It's like, "Oh, this mass-murderer, he was a Christian."

I really thank God to know the truth. I thank you for coming, again, for braving the elements. God bless you all, and thank you for your time. Merry Christmas!