

A Sermon for Christmas Eve 2006
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The problem with most plans to change the world is that they deal with symptoms and not the root cause. The revolutionary, seeing the flaws in one system, establishes another system in its place as the answer. But the new system turns out to be flawed as well because the problem wasn't with the system; the problem was with the people.

Christmas is the beginning of God's revolution. As Mary said, "He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and hath exalted the humble and meek" (Luke 1:51-2). God's plan to change the world begins, not with a change of systems, but with a renewal of mankind.

The problem is that we are a fallen people, a race of sinners. To be a sinner does not mean that we can never do anything that is good, that we can't be good neighbors and friends and make a contribution to society. To be a sinner means that no matter how much good we do, we fall short of God's perfect will. There is an essential flaw in the human condition that keeps us from being all that God intended us to be when he made us—and no change in system or philosophy, no increased resolve or striving can fix it.

Christmas is aimed at this flaw. The baby in the manger is a different kind of man, He is, as Hebrews says, like us in every way except for sin (Hebrews 2:17, 4:15). He was born with our genuine humanity, of the Virgin Mary; but he was born without sin because God is his Father. Thus, Christ, God become man, is the answer to the human condition.

As the New Man, Christ came to do what the first man failed to do; he came to resist the devil's temptation and live the perfectly obedient and faithful life. He came to die the sacrificial death that atones for our sin. And he came to rise from the dead. Christmas is the beginning. Christmas provides the raw material that makes Easter both possible and inevitable. Because God became man, God faced death and death was conquered.

Christ shares his life, his victory over sin and death, with us through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit makes our own resurrection both possible and inevitable. We "look for the Resurrection of the dead: and the Life of the world to come" because the life of the baby in the manger is given to us as a gift in baptism.

This revolution that begins at Christmas works from the inside out. This is why many people miss it. We don't want to acknowledge that the problem is in our own hearts and minds, so we look for the problem out there somewhere. We blame the system, the circumstances and other people. We even enlist religion to help us. We try to find a program or a movement that will help us solve the problem.

The church is that collection of people in whom this inner revolution is taking place. God plants his Holy Spirit in our hearts. And our lives are turned upside down. Sin is confronted; forgiveness is experienced; behavior is changed. There is peace, there is joy—even though not one external thing may have changed.

But external things will change. Our introit today proclaims God's word in Psalm 2: "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." In Psalm 2, God goes on to say to his Son, "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession." The revolution begins in a manger, but it ends on a throne. It begins in the heart but it ends with the resurrection of the dead.

God is making new people to live in a renewed creation where Christ is King. The revolution begins in each penitent heart that turns to Christ in faith. But when it is finished, "every knee should bow and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Philippians 2:10 KJV).

On Christmas we look backward and forward. We look backward to the beginning of our salvation; to the babe in the manger, to God become man and to the life he shares with us through the gift of the Spirit. And we look forward to all that Christmas promises: to resurrection and to the coming of Christ the King.