

**Sermon:** *What Difference does Christmas Make*  
**Text:** *Luke 2:1 – 14*  
**Date:** *December 25, 2011 AM*  
**Place:** *Jesup First UMC*

So what! It's Christmas morning and all around the world, Christians are celebrating the birth of our Savior and Lord, Jesus the Messiah! But so what? What difference does this day make? Now, think about that for a minute before you answer. What difference does this day make in your life? How will your life be different tomorrow because of Christmas?

Now, let's be totally honest for a moment: Christmas doesn't really change the world very much. Even for those of us who believe in Jesus, Christmas can be just another day, a day celebrated like any other great American holiday. Santa, holly, and mistletoe! Family, friends, and food! Oh ... and lots of bills. So, what difference does Christmas make?

Well, if Christmas is going to make any difference at all, we have to get beyond all the hype and hysteria of the way we typically celebrate this day and get back to the original purpose of Christmas, God's purpose. *“For God sent His Son into the world not to condemn it, but so that the world might be saved through Him.”*<sup>1</sup> Jesus came to change everything. Listen again to the angel's announcement: *“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for you and all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly, a great company of heavenly hosts joined the angel, praising God and saying,*

*‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.’*

Christmas changes everything. It changes my life and your life ... well ... if we let it.

***FIRST, CHRISTMAS CHANGES MY LIFE BY ALLOWING ME TO EXPERIENCE TRUE PASSION!*** Oh, we’ve all experienced the cheap substitutes: people who “love” us for selfish gain, people who “love” us as long as we scratch their back and do what they want. But in Jesus, we experience true love. John said: *“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love.”* In Jesus, love put on skin and bones and invaded a very self-centered world so that we could learn the way of love.

One cold, winter night, a farmer looked out the window and saw a flock of birds scratching in the snow, searching for food. Now, the farmer knew that if he didn’t get them into the barn where it was warm those birds would die. So, he put on his coat and went out and opened the barn door, but the birds didn’t fly in. So, he turned on the lights, but they didn’t fly in. So, he sprinkled seed from the barn to the field where the birds were, but they didn’t fly in. He even tried to chase them into the barn, but that didn’t work either. And finally, he fell on his knees and said, *“If only I was a bird. Then, I could tell them about the warm barn and the fine seed and I would save them all.”*

The world was a very cold and lonely place, until God became man and allowed us to experience the warmth of His love.

***SECOND, CHRISTMAS CHANGES MY LIFE BY ALLOWING ME TO EXPERIENCE TRUE PEACE!*** Now, the truth is that peace is something that we all need; it's something we all spend a lot of time and energy pursuing, but we really don't experience it very much. Past failures haunt us. Past experiences influence us. Questions and doubts plague our thoughts. Stress and worry fill our days. But in Jesus, we experience true peace. Listen again to the angel's announcement: "Peace on earth and good will to all God's people."

***Peace! Peace with God!*** Paul said: "Therefore since we have been made right with God by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ has done for us."<sup>2</sup> Because Christ has come, the sin that so permeated our lives and separated us from God no longer has dominion over us. We have peace ... peace with God.

***Peace! Peace with one another!*** Listen, let's be honest for a minute, we really don't live at peace with one another. We have conflicts, even within our church family. Something that somebody else does really gets on our nerves. He talks too much; she's much too nosey; and he's too bossy! There's always something that causes ill feelings and harsh words, but Christ calls us to live at peace with everybody. Paul said: "If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."<sup>3</sup>

You see, when we understand what Christmas is all about, that Jesus came to help us experience peace by forgiving us and reconciling us to a right relationship with God, then surely – since God has done all this for me – I can forgive and accept others just the way they are – warts and all – and live in peace with them too.

***Peace! Peace with myself!*** You know, nobody causes you more trouble than you. And because of that there are people that don't like themselves very much. Paul was at war with himself; he said: **"I can't do the things I want to do and the things I don't want to do are the things I do all the time. O wretched man that I am."** But then, he told the church at Corinth: **"Those who have become Christians have become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone and a new life has begun."**<sup>4</sup>

In Christ, I can have peace with me, because I am a new creature. I'm not the person I once was. Now, I'm not perfect and I fail God every day, but I am God's boy; you're God's boy or God's girl. And He loves you so much that He gave His only Son for you.

Peace! Peace with God! Peace with others! And Peace with me! This world is a world of constant conflict, but God became man and allowed us to experience true peace!

***THIRD, CHRISTMAS CHANGES MY LIFE BY ALLOWING ME TO EXPERIENCE TRUE PURPOSE!*** I think one of the saddest truths we face in the church is that 20% of the people do 80% of the work and give 80% of the money to support the ministry of the church.

And 20% of the people do absolutely nothing and give absolutely nothing. Most Christians lack a sense of purpose. And so, Rick Warren comes along and writes, "*The Purpose Driven Life*" and it sells millions of copies around the world, because there is something inside each of us that really wants to know why we're here. We want a sense of purpose!

Well, here's an aspect of the Christmas story that is simply amazing: God takes ordinary people and uses them to accomplish extraordinary purposes. Mary, an ordinary peasant girl, becomes the mother of God's Son. Joseph, a lowly carpenter, becomes His earthly father. Shepherds, the lowest of the low, become the church's first evangelists. Gentiles from the east tell the story too.

Christmas gives us purpose! Because of Christmas, we have a story to tell. Because of Christmas, we have a ministry to perform. Because of Christmas, we have a God to serve. Life can be pretty mundane and meaningless, but God became man and gives us true purpose!

Now, honestly, you and I have a choice to make. In Christ, God has come to change our world. Now, we can continue to live like we did yesterday and the day before that and the day before that, living life like nothing has changed. Or we can surrender to the change that happens when we experience **True Passion, True Peace, and True Purpose** in the gift of a babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Oh friends, it's Christmas and whether you know it or not, everything has changed! Have you?

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- 1 John 3:17
  - 2 Romans 5:1
  - 3 Romans 12:18
  - 4 II Corinthian 5:17