

## Unto You is Born This Day A Savior

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson to the Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on Christmas Eve, 1991, at Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church. Scripture Lessons: Luke 2:1-20.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

I wonder what went through your minds when you heard the Christmas story a few seconds ago. Maybe some of you didn't listen carefully. This often happens to me when I'm sitting in a congregation rather than leading the service. The words pass in one ear and out the other while I'm thinking of so many other things.

Or maybe some of you thought you were hearing a fairy tale; something really too good to be true; a beautiful story for children. This isn't the time to debate you. I'd loved to talk with you at some other time about why I believe this story is really true, but not this evening.

And maybe some of you, when you heard this story, thought of when you were a little boy or girl. You thought especially of your mother and father, long ago, with your brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins on Christmas morning when you were just a little girl or boy.

These are all very human reactions to the Christmas story, a little mind-wandering, maybe a little unbelief, and probably a lot of Christmas nostalgia.

Until the Angel of the Lord appears and wakes you up and shakes you up! And that's what the Angel of the Lord wants to do to you this evening.

The Angel of the Lord is in this little town of Oxford tonight; passing through our streets and homes and churches. The Angel is in this town tonight for those who're celebrating Christmas Eve in loneliness and grief; but also for those

who're celebrating with laughter and surrounded by their families. The Angel of the Lord is, in fact, here with us tonight. You might not see the Angel but you've already heard the Angel's message. My job is to let you hear the Angel's words again. If I'm successful, If somehow you're able to hear the Angel of the Lord, the glory of the Lord will shine around you this evening.

This is what the Angel of the Lord is saying: "To you is born a Savior!" That's what the Angel of the Lord wants you to hear this evening. To you! YOU! Whoever you are! Regardless of who you are or what you are or have been or done! Whether you're good or bad! Whether you're religious or the most profane man or woman in town! Whether you're living in sin or in a state of grace! Whether or not you even believe! Even if you think this story is a fairy-tale! No one is excluded. The Angel of the Lord is here this evening telling you that a Savior has been born to you.

For your sake God was not willing to simply remain up there in heaven, far away, but willed to become a human being; for you God emptied God's self that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. God became a human being for no other reason than to save you from your sins, yourselves, from death and hell. God didn't have to do this. God wasn't compelled to do this. God did this out of free love and mercy.

Many of us feel low sometimes. We find resisting temptation difficult. We're frightened by the thought of illness, suffering and death. It's here that the message of the Angel means so much to me. Through Christ, God knows what it's

like to be tempted. God knows what it's like to suffer. When you pray, you don't have to explain to God what it's like. God already knows. God has been through it. God has experienced it first hand. You have a God who knows and understands your weaknesses; knows what you need to be saved from - and, in fact, has already saved you through Christ.

Suppose someone comes to you for help. Perhaps his wife died recently and he feels totally lost. You want to help. You try to think what it must be like to lose your wife but your own wife is alive and well. You imagine what he's going through and try to respond. That's sympathy and it's a very valuable thing.

But now try to imagine a different situation. Your own wife died recently. Immediately, you can relate to this man. You've shared a common experience. "I know just how you must feel!", you can say. You can be of real help to this man. This is empathy - your feeling is based on a shared experience.

God helps and saves you from *all* that you need to be saved from *whatever it may be* because God, in Christ, has experienced all that you have. When you're tempted or suffer, God empathizes with you. When you feel at times that even God has forsaken you. God, in Christ, says to you, "I know just how you feel." God has been through it all from birth, to suffering and death.

The Angel of the Lord is here this evening to tell you that this Savior ~~who has been~~ born to you brings salvation to you free of charge, without your deserving, without your help, and without your paying the bill. All you're asked to do is to stretch out your empty hands, to receive the gift, and to be thankful.

What will you do if you've heard the Angel of the Lord this evening? Will you or can you continue in your old ways if you have really heard the Angel of the Lord? Will you arise, make haste and set out on that journey that will take you to Christ, your Savior? Will you glorify and praise God for all that you've heard and seen as it was told unto you by the Angel of the Lord?

Let us pray: Gracious God, you do not forget us or abandon us or reject us. You have given us nothing less than yourself. We spread before you all that troubles us, our mistakes, our errors and sins, also our rebellion and our bitterness—our whole heart. We commit all this into the faithful hands which you have stretched out to us in our Savior, Christ. Take us as we are and change us so that we will love and serve you and our neighbor to our life's end. This we ask in the name of our Savior, Christ. Amen.

Much of this sermon is a paraphrase of part of a sermon by Karl Barth. One section relies on Alistair McGrath's, *I Believe: Understanding and Applying the Apostles' Creed*.