

## Saved by Love

On this 8<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas, the 8<sup>th</sup> day of celebrating Jesus' birth, which also is the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the new year 2018, we return to St. Luke's nativity story, *"After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel..."*

Luke uses this event and the two longer stories that follow, Jesus being presented in the temple 40 days after his birth, and Jesus teaching in the temple when he was 12 years old, to show us the importance of the Jewish faith and traditions for Mary and Joseph.

Jesus is dedicated to God in these ancient ceremonies. He becomes part of the covenanted community. His birth is the sign that the Law of the Lord had been fulfilled, the Kingdom of God has broken into this world.

Luke's story of Jesus' birth is quite different from Matthew's. On Sunday, we'll read Matthew's account of the visit of the 3 Wise Men, the Kings. But both Matthew and Luke agree on one significant fact, this baby boy will be given the name Jesus, the one who saves, savior.

In Matthew, the angel tells Joseph, *"You are to name him Jesus for he will save his people from their sins"*. In Luke, the angel tells Mary *"You will name him Jesus... of his Kingdom there will be no end."* At conception, at the first announcement of Mary's pregnancy, we know Jesus' identity, we know his life's mission, we know that he has come to save the world, to bring salvation.

Jesus saves us as he shows us God's love, as he gives us God's love, and as he asks us to show God's love. We are saved by love.

What are we saved from? That's a complicated question; we might each answer differently. Clearly, all 4 of the Gospel writers affirm that Jesus saves us from religious and political oppression, tyranny. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, this oppression was attributed politically to the Roman Empire. In religion, spiritually, the scribes and Pharisees, Jewish religious leaders, had perverted the centuries-old teaching of the prophets and the Torah, the Law. Jesus comes in every age to save us from any and all political systems and religious authorities that oppose peace, justice, truth, and freedom. Jesus saves us from any and all evil powers.

Jesus also saves us from sin, from our flesh, from idolatry that can infect human nature. It might be pride or anger or lust --- any of the 7 deadly sins. It could be materialism, selfishness, the quest to dominate, have power over others. We know Jesus as a healer, one who brought and continues to bring in our own day through the power of the Holy Spirit, healing in body, mind and spirit.

Jesus saves us from the finality and meaninglessness of physical death. Jesus brings us the hope for heaven, for a spiritual life that is eternal, for communion with those we love. Jesus saves us by a love stronger than death.

I'd add one more to this list. Jesus saves us from fear. The disciples were clearly in shock after Jesus was executed. Those who saw the empty tomb 3 days later were overcome by fear. When the risen Jesus met them, he told them "*Do not be afraid ...go and tell the others ...I have risen from the dead ...go to Galilee ...there they will see me.*" (Matthew 28:5-10)

This is the light we find in the darkest of times --- the light of Jesus' saving love. The joy that has come in the world because we see this light of love and we hope it will continue to guide us and shine through us. It is the glory of God's love for us, God's saving love is the gift of his only begotten Son.

C. S. Lewis writes of this gift of glory, this beautiful light, in his book "The Weight of Glory". He reminds us "*We do not want merely to see beauty... we want... to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it...*"<sup>1</sup>. St. Paul echoes this when he writes we are being "*transformed... from one degree of glory to another...*". (2 Corinthians 4:18)

This is the same glory Mary and Joseph realized with the birth of their son. This glory is why he is named Jesus; it is why shepherds and Kings came to his manger; it's why you and I are here. We know Jesus, our savior. He has saved us; He is saving us; He will save us.

Always.

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<sup>1</sup> "A Year with C. S. Lewis", C. S. Lewis, Harper One, New York, 2003, p. 397