

**Text: Matthew 1.18-25**  
**St Stephen's**

**Dec 24<sup>th</sup>, 2006**  
**Christmas Eve**

## **Born To Give Us Second Birth**

**Tonight is a special moment in the year, where a window opens** letting us see thousands of years into the past. You can see farther and deeper than you normally are able to see, because tonight we celebrate **the births of Jesus**. Yes, we really do!

He actually **had more than one birth**; He had an Everlasting Birth, a Historical Birth, and a Spiritual Birth. Let's start with...

### **1) His Everlasting Birth: He Was Begotten Of His Father Into Eternity**

The archangel Gabriel said it like this to Mary,

*"You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne..."*

Luke 1:30-32 (NLT)

It was as if God said to Mary, "My Son shall be Your Son"! It took a long time for people to understand what that meant. When they did, they were **stunned**. In the **Nicene Creed** we confess it like this:

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father...*

**Say, 'Eternally begotten'**. The authors of our creeds were summarizing what the Bible teaches about the relationship between Jesus and his Father before he was born on earth. What they are saying, in shorthand, is that Jesus was **always the Son** of his Father. Even back into eternity before the world was made. Always.

I don't want you to miss whose birthday we celebrate this day. This is **not a normal man**. Not even a **great** man. Not even the **greatest** man! This

is **the eternal Son of God**, who existed before anything existed. Who was always begotten of the Father, into eternity past, before he was born in Bethlehem. **We can see back into eternity, tonight**

**I was trying to explain this to our Middle-Schoolers** early this month... acting it out... I had Nate Harper stand next to me, pretending to be my son. I put my arm around his shoulders and said,

*The Father loves the Son. And the Son loves the Father. And it has always been like this. Always. Even before the world was created. And then God decided, out of that love, to create the cosmos and the galaxies and the earth and the species and finally man and woman...*

And then something happened. The way I acted it out to the kids was to have them **stand up and turn their backs to us**. That's easy to do, **turn your back and move away from the presence of the Lord**. And **settle in** there. Life gets dark. Evil becomes normal. Sounds too familiar, too modern! I wonder **if you can see it tonight?** I want to give you a bird's eye view

**Mark Steyn** wrote a remarkable book this year called "**America Alone**". He traces the convergence of **three sobering facts** in western culture. The first is the

### **1) Demographic Decline of the West**

What he means by this is that in the countries of Europe and Canada and the rest of the West, people are **not having kids**. That is true of almost every developed nation other than the United States. It takes an average of 2.1 live births per woman for a country to keep it's population level. That is about the birthrate in the US. Canada has a birthrate of under 1.5. Europe as a whole, 1.38. Japan, 1.32. Russia. 1.14. Italy and Greece are leading the decline. The West is simply going out of business.

### **2) The Unsustainability of the Advanced Western State**

By that, Steyn means that the cost of the modern social welfare state will soon surge past the ability of it's declining workforce to support it. There is no precedent in human history for economic growth on declining population. Europe is facing a catastrophe.

### 3) Civilizational Exhaustion

This is Steyn's third fact, the spiritual and civilizational exhaustion of the West. What he means is that we have **lost confidence** in the value of our cultural heritage and are unwilling to defend it. Our **multiculturalism** declares that any and all cultures deserve the same respect – which is sheer nonsense. Some cultures are degrading. Others are brutal. They are not all the same! And then we get **neurotically apologetic** about the best of our heritage.

**What are the options?** I can see **two quick possibilities**:

**Option 1: Islam** Don't laugh. Islam is the fastest growing religion in America. More people in England attend mosques each week than churches. The reproduction rates for Islamic women in Europe is about 3.5 births per woman. The Muslim population in Europe will reach a workable majority in our lifetimes, with current trends. And have you noticed that the boundary line between the Islamic and non-Islamic world is **never peaceful**? And that this boundary line **is always in the news**? And that the boundary line now cuts through London and Madrid and Paris and Toronto? My Air Force son in England has been warned to stay out of London over the holidays. A plot to blow up the chunnel between England and France was uncovered just days ago. Islam offers the West **a retreat to the dark ages**.

**Option 2: Atheistic Humanism.** This is the **John Lennon Model**, with plenty of friends in Europe and America.

*Imagine there's no Heaven  
It's easy if you try  
No hell below us  
Above us only sky*

*Nothing to kill or die for  
And no religion too  
Imagine all the people  
Living life in peace*

I used to sing it; it was the anthem of the radical left. But **it doesn't work that way**. If there is no God, then there is no inherent value to human life. No coherent capacity for a moral life larger than myself. No future beyond the here and now. No "living life in peace." Eventually people like that **arc in one of two directions** – the **brutal inhumanity** of last century's fascists and communists, or the **sedated inhumanity** of today's culture, fixated on their own pleasures and amusements, as we drift into the approaching dark and violent night.

I am sorry to have to speak like this on Christmas eve. I really am. I wish the world wasn't like this. But it is, and we can see this **darkness descending** from our vantage point tonight. **I don't want you to miss it. Because God didn't and he doesn't. God launched a third option.** Let's go back to the **births of Jesus**. His first was his everlasting birth; he was *eternally begotten of the Father*... Eventually people turn away **and darkness descends**. Then comes...

## 2) His Historical Birth: Born of Mary in Bethlehem

*His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit... Matt 1.18-19*

So God answers the world's darkness with a **Virgin Birth**. Not exactly the script we would write. The **virgin birth is two important things**: it is the means by which **God became man and stepped into this world**, by which God's nature and human nature were joined in Jesus.

But it is also something else that draws my attention tonight; it is a clear **declaration by God** that the **rising darkness** outside us and the disorder inside us **shall not be the last words upon this world** – and need not be the last words on our lives. And that God shall **take it upon himself to personally intervene**. That our help shall come **not by human initiative** or ingenuity or might or effort that, but **by God's grace** – unearned, unsought, undeserved, but freely given.

Here's how Paul wrote about Jesus entry into the world...

*For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. Tit 2:11*

We are so used to meeting our challenges in life with **our own resources**, our own **thoughts**, our own **capabilities**. And you might think it is going quite well, that we don't need God's intervention. Maybe just a little help from time to time. But you would be wrong. Children will teach you that! Life will teach you that before your days are done. Darkness inside us and outside us teaches that.

For most of us, looking to God's grace is a massive adjustment. But you have to remember that **God can do what you can not do**. And he is **willing** to do it. **No matter** who you are, no matter what you've done. Ready and willing. That's why we call it **grace**.

**Here's how he does it** - Jesus steps into the world by literally **indwelling** his now-pregnant mother. That is **his plan** for fixing the world. **One person at a time, fixing us from the inside out. And the way is open.** For any woman, any man. Wide open even for you and for me. I hope you can **see his grace, tonight**.

This brings us to **his third birth...**

### **3) His Spiritual Birth: Born In Us Today**

I love the hymn we will sing later tonight, Hark the Herald Angels Sing...

*Mild He lays His glory by*

*Born that man no more may die*

*Born to raise the sons of earth*

**Born to give them second birth**

His eternal birth and his historical birth all prepare for **his birth in us**. He was born of his Father into eternity. He was born of his mother in history. That he might be born in us today. That is God's plan for dealing with the world's darkness. By **sending his Son to live inside people. One person at a time, fixing us from the inside out.**

Sometimes **this invasion starts out very small**, and you wonder if anything has happened at all. But Jesus always taught that the **power to grow** is not in you and in me; it is **in the seed God plants in us**. The seed may look little, may start small, but it is **big with life**.

I remember **when I first yielded to Jesus**, honestly, it was a little thing, a possible **add-on component** to my life. I said that I would be open to giving this thing a try... and then it began to grow. **He began to grow**.

**What was very little became very large**. God began the lifelong process of seeping into every corner of my heart with his grace. Every dark room, opened and cleansed with grace. Every dark thought forgiven and reshaped with grace. Every dark memory, healed by grace. Every dark corridor, lighted with grace. It still goes on. It all began with a simple, short prayer.

**How does this happen?** The short answer is that God does it. It is his project, from start to finish. But he **won't do it without you**.

**You can't do it without him, and he won't do it without you.**

*"How will this be," Mary asked...*

*Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true."*

Lk 1:34, 38 (NLT)

**That is all Mary did**. She consented to God's plan to place Jesus inside her.

She said "Yes, please."

She yielded to him,

invited him in,

consented to his plan –

she received him into her.

*"I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true."*

I look around at our world and there is **much to fear**. We have tough days ahead. Western culture is dying before our eyes. A radicalized Islam is fast rising.

But I believe that the challenges we face in our days **can be met - by one force**.

By men and women indwelled by the living Son of God, who is living in them and through them.

By men and women who have said to him, "Let it be to me according to your plan."

By men and women who have yielded their lives and their days to the Son of God, who count him as the great treasure of their lives, and have received him and follow him.

I think **God is calling many new sons and daughters** to himself this very night, all over this country, **in the very moment of rising darkness**.

Would you like to join us?

Are you ready to receive him into your own life tonight? To yield to him, to say, "Yes!!! Please!!!" to him?