

"Christmas has Consequences"

Text: Deuteronomy 18:15-19

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ – whose birth we this day celebrate. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Did you get exactly what you wanted for Christmas? All are no doubt familiar with the saying, "*Be careful what you wish for.*" Bad grammar aside, the saying probably rings true for most or all of you – and not just in connection with Christmas presents. Jobs, boyfriends, girlfriends, money, house, car, boat, motorcycle, fame – I suspect that at least every *adult* here this morning has longed for what was actually very bad for you. Some of these things were denied us; some were granted – probably to teach us a lesson. "*All that glitters is not gold*" is more than just a line by Shakespeare in the Merchant of Venice.

Every single human being has dreams. Every single human being has yearnings and desires. You do, I do. Yet when those yearnings or desires are realized, what human beings invariably discover is that every path that they chose led them somewhere, often where they never envisioned going. Those that achieve a dream most often find that every blessing, every gift or success, every victory carried consequences. In fact the realization of any dream is seldom the end. It is usually just the beginning of a whole new set of demands and responsibilities. Consider that fact as you hear our text for this Christmas morning, recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy, the 18th Chapter:

ESV Deuteronomy 18:15-19 *"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers--it is to him you shall listen--¹⁶ just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.'¹⁷ And the LORD said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken.¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.¹⁹ And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.*

These are God's Words. On this day of giving, we marvel at the priceless gift of God's very words – the value of which truly has no measure. That you and I here this morning might be granted a God-pleasing reverence for these words, and that each one of us might be instructed and

strengthened by them on this special occasion, so we pray, "***Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.***" Amen.

The older you are, the more you probably relate to our introduction. Realizing dreams is very often both the good news and the bad news. In some cases this is easy to recognize; as, for example, when individuals with no self-control win the lottery. Most imagine that money is the solution to most, if not all, of their problems. Few ever stop to consider that the fulfillment of that particular dream will unquestionably make their life infinitely more complicated and difficult. Almost without exception, their "dream-come-true" creates a whole world of responsibility that just makes what they thought was a bad situation immeasurably worse.

In a way it's sort of like growing up. The older, bigger, and stronger you get, the more you can control or manipulate your environment. The more you can control your environment, the more responsibility you need to demonstrate.

You've heard this before, but it bears repeating in this context. *Who is the most self-centered, inconsiderate, demanding, ego-centric person you have ever known?* The answer is you, as a newborn. When you were first born, you could do almost nothing. Good thing, since there is absolutely nothing in this world more self-centered and lawless than a baby. The only thing that saves the rest of us is the fact that infants have a limited repertoire. A baby never stops to think, for example, that it is the middle of the night and mom and dad are dead tired and finally getting some much needed sleep. If I'm a baby and I'm hungry, I cry. I need a diaper change – I cry. Lonely – cry. Scared – cry. Just happen to be awake and am tired of life as I know it – cry.

As the baby grows and is able to open doors and put things in his mouth, his mom and dad have to start teaching him important things – like the fact that not everything belongs in your mouth, and that kitties do not like to be ridden bareback. (Nor, for that matter, do they like to be saddled.) Once you're all grown up you have the power to do pretty much anything you want. What you need to realize is that the greater your power and the greater your "empire," the greater your responsibility and the greater the consequences connected with your actions.

Take a quick run through the average human life and you'll see what we're talking about here. When you are little you can't wait to go to school. Once you get to school, you need to have learned not to stick

your finger in the other little boy's eye just because you think he took your crayons. Mess up, and mom and dad get called in. On life goes. Junior high finally arrives, and then you dream about high school. After that, college, and then the working world. Now poking someone else in the eye to get what you want is called assault. Mess up there, and the police get called in. With each step, the responsibilities increase and the punishment for mistakes grows ever more serious. With the blessings of marriage come greater influences and even more weighty responsibilities. Add children and suddenly you find that God holds you responsible for another human soul. More wealth, more influence, more power - all mean even more colossal consequences for failure and abuse.

So what is the ultimate? What is the height, the pinnacle, the zenith of importance and consequence? President of the United States? CEO of a multinational conglomerate? Where is it that the importance of your decisions or actions is at its absolute maximum?

This is where our text comes in. Here we find the ultimate importance for all mankind, the ultimate in consequence. In our text we read one of the early prophecies of the Savior, whose birth we today celebrate. The occasion for this prophecy was the request the Children of Israel made at Mt. Sinai (or Mt. Horeb as it is called in our text). It was there that the voice of their God absolutely terrified the Jews. It caused them to fear for their very lives. They begged God for a mediator, one who would act as a go-between so that they would not have to endure the terror they felt at what was arguably rather close and direct contact with their God. God's reply was something along the lines of, *"I intend to do just that."* His solution was to send Jesus Christ as both our Savior and Mediator.

But just what does that promise have to do with achieving a goal or realizing a dream and the consequences of such things? In our text, God revealed to his people not only that they were going to get their wish because he was going to send a Mediator or Savior, he also made clear that the arrival of that Savior would carry with it *profound consequences*. To this end God in our text not only said, ***"I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him."*** He also added this: ***"And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him."***

Decade after decade passed. Generation after generation came and went. The promise of the Savior was carried forward. For centuries God's faithful people looked forward to the advent of the Savior. Generation after generation yearned for that great event. The prophecies of old were

memorized and repeated over and over again. Though generation after generation came and went, the promise of a Messiah remained.

This was the goal – the ultimate goal – for God's people since that first promise in the Garden of Eden. This was the dream shared ever since, by king and by carpenter, by scholar and by slave. Always they looked forward to that great day when the Promised Messiah would appear. What apparently never occurred to them is the fact that, as with any dream, with the realization of this dream, this promise, came obligations and consequences unlike any other in all creation.

Do you imagine, for example, that all those folks who looked for the fulfillment of the ancient promise ever stopped to consider the consequences of the fulfillment of that promise? How could there possibly be any sort of negative connected with the sending the Messiah? God in our text clearly warned that with the coming of the Mediator came also the potential to *reject* the words or message of that Mediator. Again, in the words of our text, ***"And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him."***

The fact is, once Jesus Christ was born, the clear and distinct dividing line between heaven and hell was permanently and indelibly drawn. In ancient times, for example, Isaac and Ishmael shared the same father, Abraham. Both could and would have been saved through faith in the promise of the Savior. Yet with the coming of Jesus Christ, that razor-sharp line has been drawn. We are now no longer saved through faith in the promise of a Savior, we are saved through faith in *a very specific Savior*, Jesus Christ. With the realization of mankind's greatest dream came the ultimate consequence, for to reject Jesus Christ and his work of redemption is to reject eternal life itself. Jesus himself clearly taught this pivotal truth when he said, ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*** (John 14:6)

All this means that from the first Christmas Day onward "the Promise" has a name, an identity. The Promised Savior is no longer nameless and faceless, it is Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ *alone*. No one therefore that rejects Jesus Christ can lay claim to the Christian God, for to reject Jesus Christ is to reject God the Father. In Luke 10:16 Jesus himself said: ***"He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me."***

For the most part, mankind has no idea, no concept, of the profound consequences connected to the coming of Jesus Christ into the world.

They have no concept that that sweet little figurine in the manger of their nativity set represents both life and death. To those who believe in him, he is Lord and Savior and life eternal. To those who reject Jesus and his payment for their sins, that same Jesus is death; he is "foolishness" and an offense. Paul described it this way in 2 Corinthians 2:14-17: **"Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. ¹⁵ For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. ¹⁶ To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? ¹⁷ For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ."**

Know then finally that the coming of that tiny little baby in the manger in Bethlehem changed everything. He is, in his very person, the single, lone path to heaven. Jesus died to pay for your sins. Yet unbelief – rejection of Jesus Christ as your Savior – will bring eternal condemnation. Either you trust Jesus to have paid the blood-debt owed by you on account of your sins, or that wrath of God will one day be visited upon you. Using the message of our text, either you listen to the words of Jesus Christ and live, or reject them and face the wrath of a holy God.

Obviously this eternal threat of the law ought to strike terror in the hearts of those who reject Jesus Christ. Not so with you. On the contrary, God grant that you see the Christ Child this Christmas Day, and always, with the eyes of wisdom and understanding, and above all with the eyes of pure and holy faith and trust. Here, those that are Christ's experience only peace, comfort, and assurance in the fact of the forgiveness of our sins and in his declaration that we are his beloved children and heirs of heaven.

Jesus is indeed the dividing point between heaven and hell. This is the consequence of Christmas. **"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. He that believes not shall be condemned."** Let this be the heart of your celebration and the truth that gives you true peace and joy. Amen.

The Pre-Sermon Hymn -710 *(Brown Hymnal)*
"Once In Royal David's City"

The Sermon – Text: Deuteronomy 18:15-19
"**Christmas has Consequences**"

The Post-Sermon Hymn -92 *(Red Hymnal)*
"Now Sing We, Now Rejoice"

The Prayers followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -91 *(Stanzas 1-2, 4-5 & 9) (Red Hymnal)*
"Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this Christmas morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!

St. Paul Lutheran Church is a member congregation of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative synod with congregations throughout the United States and missions and affiliates around the world. If you are visiting from another city, please ask the pastor for the name of a CLC church near you.

Announcements:

Christmas Flowers – If you purchased one of the poinsettias with which the church has been decorated again this Christmas season, please feel free to take your plant(s) home with you after the service this morning, or consider gifting them to someone who might enjoy them.

Schedule – Please note that there is no Confirmation Class or Midweek Bible Study scheduled for this week or next. Both are scheduled to resume on January 6th. It is our intention to follow the regular schedule next Sunday, including Sunday School at 9am and Sunday Worship at 10am, but there will be no Bible Class since Pastor Roehl will be out of town.



St Paul Lutheran Church Bismarck, ND

Christmas Day Service 2020



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Mark Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor

Christmas Day Service – December 25, 2019

Pre-Service Music

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn -87 (*Stanza 1*) (*Red Hymnal*)
"Joy to the World"

Scripture Reading by the Pastor

(*Isaiah 9:2, 6-7*) The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined...⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

The Response Sung by the Congregation – (Hymn 79)

Rejoice, rejoice this happy morn, a Savior unto us is born,
The Christ the Lord of Glory.
His lowly birth in Bethlehem the angels from on high proclaim
And sing redemption's story.
My soul, extol God's great favor, bless Him ever for salvation.
Give Him praise and adoration.

Call to Repentance by the Pastor

On this great day we lift our hearts and voices in thanksgiving to our God. Yet our joy on this occasion is also mixed with sobriety, for we recognize that it was our sin that brought Jesus to earth, where He paid the penalty that we deserved. It is fitting and right therefore that we humbly confess our sins to our God on this morning when we celebrate the birth of the One who came to pay for those sins.

The Confession of Sins (*Sung to "Oh Come Oh Come Emmanuel"*)

1. Alas, my God, my sins are great, my conscience doth upbraid me;
And now I find that in my strait, no man hath power to aid me.
Forgive me Lord; turn not my soul away; for Jesus died to save me.

2. And fled I hence in my despair, in some lone spot to hide me,
My griefs would still be with me there, and peace still be denied me.
Forgive me Lord; turn not my soul away; for Jesus died to save me.
3. Lord, Thee I seek, I merit naught; yet pity and restore me.
Just God, be not Thy wrath my lot; Thy Son hath suffered for me.
Forgive me Lord; turn not my soul away; for Jesus died to save me.

Absolution (*Announced by the Pastor*)

Response (*Sung to the tune of 708 "Oh Come All Ye Faithful"*)

The Lord God be with us, and with all His children
Oh come let us lift our spirits unto the Lord
With hearts rejoicing, thanks to Him we render
With joy we come before Him, in gratefulness implore Him
With thankful hearts adore Him, Christ the Lord!

The Collect for the Day (*Read by the Pastor*)

Grant, Almighty God, that the birth of Your only-begotten Son in human flesh may bring true joy to our hearts – we who through sin were held in the bondage of darkness and despair. This we ask through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

The Scripture Lessons:

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 62:1-4,10-12) As the Lord dealt with our sin problem in a most remarkable way, so it ought not surprise us that the Lord also demonstrated his power in a most remarkable way. The great power of God is his love and mercy, demonstrated nowhere more clearly than in the gift of His Son as our Savior.

The New Testament Lesson: (Galatians 4:1-7) Our New Testament reading gives us a special insight into the event we celebrate on this day – the birth of our Lord Jesus. God was not slow in keeping his promise to send our Savior. He knew there was a "just right time" and he sent Jesus at just that right time.

The Confession of Faith – (The Christmas Creed)

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Who sent His Son to become my Savior;

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, my Lord, the long-promised Messiah, Who came as foretold, being conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, announced by the angels, worshipped by the shepherds, adored by the Wise Men, Who lived to suffer, die, and rise again, To free me from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil;

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, Who has brought me to faith in my Savior, And by whose continuous work in my heart, I rejoice in my salvation, Walk in Christ, Show forth His praises, And will one day live and reign with Him in all eternity. Amen.