

## **This Child Changes Everything**

### **I. We Needed this Change**

### **II. This Change Is Good**

### **III. Embrace this Change**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends and Worshipers of our Newborn King:

I have visited quite a few hospitals, and my favorite part of any hospital is the place where people go in one way and come out as different people. I'm not talking about plastic surgery or even about the wonderful work where sick or injured people are made whole again. No, I'm talking about the maternity ward. A woman goes in, usually with a man, and when both come out again, she has become a mother and he a father. They're not quite the same people they were before.

You see, it's hard to think of an event much more life-changing than the birth of a child. Those of you who have had children should be able to testify to the difference it has made in your life — and the arrival of the first one, whether a son or a daughter, permanently altered both your lifestyle and your way of looking at the world. And those of you who have not been blessed with children shouldn't have to think too hard to imagine the impact on your lives if a child were added to them.

Out of curiosity I googled the phrase "life changed" and the word "birth". I got just under 100,000 hits — think of all the people represented by those English language essays, articles, and blog entries. Then I googled "life changed" and the word "baby". That gave me just under 200,000 pages.

But despite those impressive numbers, and as wonderful a thing as a new life is, the life change that comes with the birth of a child is limited. It certainly applies to the parents. It will also affect siblings and grandparents, perhaps friends or bosses or co-workers. But with the billions and billions of people we have on this planet, the birth of one more can hardly be said to change much about the world — though sometimes it does seem the media thinks the world stops turning every time some celebrity has a baby.

But there was one birth that really did change the world. It wasn't splashed all over the tabloids or talked about on Larry King, and it didn't show up on YouTube, but the virgin birth of Jesus Christ changed everything.

I. And everything *needed* changing. Our world needed changing. And, like many a crying newborn, *we* needed changing.

Now there is plenty to like and to love in this world. There are places and people that are beautiful beyond description. But no one can deny that there is much that's wrong with this world. If I gave you pencil and paper and asked you to make a list of ten *woes* we face, you'd probably have it finished in no time. There's war and famine. Crime and terrorism. Disease and illness and injury. Storms and earthquakes, cold and heat, fire and flood. Corruption. Pollution. Pain.

And if I asked for the woes from your own lives, you'd be writing down things like worry and fear. Fractured families and failed or failing marriages. Bad bosses and bad employees. Too much work, or not enough work. Difficult children, absent parents. Too much homework, uninspiring teachers, not enough time for play. Organs that don't do what they ought to anymore, memories that are fading, years that are passing too quick. Impending death. Pain.

And with these woes — even just one or two — comes unhappiness or anger. Dissatisfaction. Depression. Stress. Paralysis. Bad decisions. Unwise behavior. Self-destructive habits. Pain.

But that is just what we should expect — from ourselves and from our world. It's exactly what God told us would result from rebellion. Our first parents were told, "If you disobey and eat from this tree, you will die", but they did it anyway because they thought they knew better than their Creator. And we have been dying ever since, and the world along with us — not just the death that is the end of life, but also the death that takes the joy and the peace and the beauty out of life as we live it.

The Apostle Paul repeated this truth in his letter to the Romans, just to make sure no one missed it: "The wages of sin is death." — that is, what you get for what you've done — disobeyed God — is death. And we're not talking about a one-time termination of life and then oblivion. No, this death is punishment for sin. We also call it damnation. We call it hell. Where God sent Satan and his angels when they rebelled is where he will send every human who follows them into sin. It should go without saying, but I'll say it anyway: We don't want that — not for us, not for anybody.

But how do we undo this death thing? How do we get out of the bind that we have gotten ourselves into with our hateful thoughts, our impatient mutterings, our childish disobedience, our selfish pride, and our lustful, envious, or violent actions? How do we solve our problem of death and sin?

Maybe you think you can buy God off by offering him all sorts of good works to balance out your sins. But that doesn't actually take away your sins — they still stink up God's nostrils, and he won't let anyone into heaven who smells like that. Perhaps you comfort yourself by pointing to someone else and saying, "Well, at least I'm not as bad as he is." But that doesn't take away your sins, either — God doesn't grade on the curve: he only accepts perfect scores. Or maybe you tell yourself that God has been impressed by sincerity — that if he sees that you're really, really trying hard to be good in certain areas that he'll overlook the areas where you're not so good. But no matter how great our plans may seem, we still mess up. And no matter how lofty our intentions may be, we still can't get it right.

I read recently about a woman who illustrated that truth pretty well. The year she turned eighty, Marie — getting older, getting more tired — found that shopping for Christmas gifts for all her friends and family had just become too difficult. She tried to get out and shop, but time was running out and she couldn't get it done. So finally she decided to simply send checks to everyone. She was sure they'd understand. So when she signed and sent out her Christmas cards, she wrote on each, "Buy your own present" — that's all she had time to write.

As soon as they were in the mail, Marie breathed a sign of relief. She enjoyed the usual flurry of family festivities and getting together with friends. She did find it a little curious, though, that no one thanked her or mentioned her gifts. Only after Christmas did she learn why: she found the gift checks lying on her desk. She had forgotten to enclose them with the cards that would have then read: "Buy your own present!"

Would that our attempts to solve our problem of sin were so simple, or even laughable. But they're not. There's nothing we on our own or in our own power can do to change God's verdict on our sin. We need — all the world needs,

and has always needed — the things that Isaiah and Paul and Luke wrote about; counsel and wonder, power and peace, a heavenly Father, justice, righteousness, redemption, hope, light, salvation. We needed the change that only *grace* could bring — but it was out of our power.

II. But not out of God's. He could change things. He could give us what we needed.

And he wanted to. He loved us even though we were unlovable and unloving rebels. And so to us a child was born, to us a son was given — God's Son and Mary's son, Jesus, our Immanuel. Into our deep darkness the Lord sent a great light and revealed two mysteries that are still beyond our understanding: first, that he would love — that he would care for us sinners so much that he would send his very best; and second, that God would become man and not only be with us and be like us but actually *be* one of us.

He changed history when he did that. Even our calendars reflect it — BC before Christ, AD in the years of our Lord Jesus. Nothing like this has ever happened, and never will again.

And lives were changed by this child's arrival. You can surely appreciate how bearing the Son of God and Savior of the world would have altered Mary's life. You fathers might be able to understand how Joseph's entire outlook was changed by this birth — that he had been entrusted with the responsibility of loving and raising and providing for this little boy as if he were his own — this little boy who was born the King of Creation and born to set his people free. And how about those shepherds? He wasn't their child in any way, but imagine how deeply what they saw and heard and talked about that one night — just a few hours of their lives! — must have changed their hearts and everything that followed.

But it's much more personal than that — more personal than a history lesson or things that happened a long time ago to people you never knew. This child changed everything for you, too. Whether you know him or not, he is your Savior. Whether you trust him or not, he came to redeem you from your sins and set you free forever. He did it without any of us asking him to. He came even though what awaited him was anything but pleasant or glorious. He was born in a humble stable to humble parents and grew up in a humble village. And then, when he was about 30 years old, he made himself known to his people, preaching and teaching and doing miracles. But his own people did not all believe him, and their leaders mostly opposed him. And within about three years they had arranged for him to be betrayed and beaten and nailed to a cross, though he had never done anything wrong.

But as unjust and undeserved as his death was, that was the plan. He came to bear the sins of all people and pay their price by pouring out his own lifeblood on the cross. He died our death. That doesn't seem like a very Christmas-y thought, but we have to know that — we have to see Good Friday and then Easter — to understand the change the Christchild brought. And when we trust this crucified Jesus for our salvation, we know that we also have the peace and perfection he came to bring, and that the angels announced to the shepherds. He even gives us eternal life. All that is quite a change. From sinner to saint, from death to life, from hell to heaven. That's everything. That's Christmas. That's love.

III. So embrace this change. Don't just nod your head and say, "Yeah, yeah, the Christmas story. Yeah, yeah, Jesus our Savior. Yeah, I guess that's right. I've heard it before, yeah, yeah." Trust it. Make it yours — not just in December,

but all year and all your life. This child did everything, suffered everything, gave everything, and changed everything *for you*. Let it make a difference!

You know, I've wondered sometimes what would happen if the "secularists" of our society ever really succeeded in taking the "Christ" out of Christmas. We talk and hear a lot about that these days — and see for ourselves — how many companies and organizations and governments have changed "Christmas" to "holiday" and in some cases even prohibited anything that could even remotely be connected to the celebration of Christ's birth.

Well, since this child changes everything, if Christ is taken out of Christmas, then I guess we'd have to say that everything just goes back to the way it was, right? No peace with God, so no peace on earth and no peace with ourselves. No sins paid for, so death still to be feared. No hope of heaven, only the certainty of hell. And all the woes and all the pain of our sin-soaked lives would still remain. Not a pretty prospect. Not a merry Christmas, and certainly not a happy holiday.

So put — *keep* — the Christ in Christmas. Keep Jesus front and center, not just in the manger scene on your mantle, but in your heart and in your life. Focus on him, today and everyday, and enjoy this new life he came to give you — a life of godly passions and purified purpose, with new brothers and sisters in the family of faith, as a people that are God's very own. Embrace Jesus and his change, and live in the peace and love the angels proclaimed, because God's favor rests upon you.

Rejoice! Smile. Be comforted. Leave your pain and sin and worries behind. Remember the Christchild. Trust in your Savior. He changes everything. Amen.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

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