

The Miracles of Christmas
January 4th, 2015

Hebrews 2:10-18
Christmas 2 B

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Christmas doesn't make sense. Not one bit of it, from the first announcement to Mary to the birth of the Savior all the way through the visit of the Magi a year or two later or the flight into Egypt shortly after.

And that's really only the start of it. Really, just about everything God does doesn't make sense. None of his plans are the least bit sane or rational. If any human being were to sit down and write this as a story, not one of us would come up with anything even remotely similar. Imagine if you were to start with this premise: "An all-powerful God who is entirely self-sufficient creates life, and that life rebels against him, destroys what he created and defies his will." Now, how would that story go?

Would the God that so carefully created everything just simply destroy what had ruined it, purely out of vengeance? That would certainly be one of our options, right? The blood rises in anger when something we created is destroyed carelessly. To see all our hard work come crashing down brings out the beast within and we want to lash out. Even if nobody did it, we'll *find* somebody to blame! And we'll take it out on them. God worked so hard, put so much care and attention into what he did, so much thought, crowned it with a special self-aware creation and gave them everything to be happy and content. And likely within days, they broke it. Deliberately. They knew what not to do and did it anyway. Everything was ruined. God should've just condemned them then and there like they deserved.

Or maybe it was that God didn't care so much about that but that looking out over his shattered creation, he should've decided to start over. That's what we would do, right? Sweep the broken pieces into the garbage can and do it again. Try again and get it right this time, not let anyone mess it up.

Or maybe it would have nothing to do with vengeance or getting it right, just simply justice. The law was broken and justice demanded that they be punished. God's perfect sense of right and wrong would demand that. There really would be no way to get around that. There were only two people and they had broken the law, they are the ones who would have to be punished.

The unthinkable option is that God should try to help us. We gave him no reason to. The miracle is that he chose to anyway.

But even that, even if we gave you the detail that God was going to work with what he had and somehow cause things to be better, the next step would baffle us just as much. Because in the story we would write it would require something from the people who needed saving. Maybe in our story it would be only the super-religious who would merit God delivering them. That only if you tried your hardest all the time that would be enough for God to take you to heaven. Or only those who did something to make up for their wrongs. You know, said the right prayers, donated some money or suffered some for the wrongs they did before they were allowed into heaven. Maybe you'd let them off easy in your version. Maybe God would offer to rescue anyone who would take it, but it would still be up to each person to decide if they wanted it, to come forward and claim it.

Mankind has invented so many variations on this theme in its history we could not list them all. But the option that none of us would come up with on our own is that God should do everything himself, from the payment for our crimes all the way up to changing our hearts to trust in him. The miracle for us is that this is exactly what he did.

And now we come to the event itself. God's intervention to help us. And again, every way that God chooses to act is contrary to our wisdom and logic. For one, that God should intervene and save human kind by lowering himself to be exactly like humankind. We are the ones in trouble. We need help from on high! What good does it accomplish for God to set aside his glory and join us? Putting that objection aside, he doesn't even make it obvious he's here! He's not born to parades and announcements in the palaces. There's no terrible earthly movement to announce his arrival. Just an angel chorus in a field to some shepherds. And he isn't born to power or prestige, he's born as lowly as it gets. God is coming to save us, he's coming to do everything, he deserves all the glory and yet he does everything possible to set that all aside as he's born. Here he is, doing the greatest thing ever, and he's practically hiding from what he deserves for it. Doesn't make sense.

But if God's entry point into this world is confounding to us, then his work is doubly so. I know we've all had those moments reading the gospels where we want to shout, "Jesus, just show them who you are! Be big, make an impression! They can't ignore that!" But Jesus goes on wandering with the homeless guys and telling people NOT to spread the word about who he was.

And then, that work finished he carried out the greatest act of selfless love the world has ever seen. In a way that we could never invent or imagine, our salvation was accomplished. Just as the author to the Hebrews describes it here: **"In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make**

the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.” Again and again it boggles the mind. We sinned! We rebelled! We are the debtors, we are the criminals! And yet our salvation was made complete by the suffering of the *one person* who did *nothing wrong*. How could his suffering possibly accomplish anything on our behalf?

In fact, as we know, it goes one step beyond just his suffering, it was death itself. Again our reading says, **“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”** This was our great problem, after all. We deserve death. And the fear of that death is a powerful force that holds us captive. It drives so many of our selfish actions and thoughts. So many of the things we continue to do wrong every day are done out of this fear. We need a solution to the eternal death that hangs over all our heads and even though God has done everything unexpected up to this point, it doesn’t stop his solution from being equally baffling.

He defeats death itself...by dying. We would never come up with that. You don’t win by dying. That’s losing. Death is tragedy at best and complete defeat at worst. But by death the enemy is defeated. And by death our fear of death is removed. And here God shows how his wisdom is beyond us. Though we ruined everything, he chose to save us because he loves us. Not because we’re loveable, but because he chose to love us. And in that love he recognized we could not save ourselves. The corruption of sin runs too deep in us. No matter how small the task he might ask, we would be unable to do it. In our sinful state, we were enemies of God. He could not accept us because of our sin, and because of our sin we could do nothing but hate our God. Whatever he might ask, even if we could do it, we wouldn’t do it. God had to do it himself.

But the sin had to be punished. The debt had to be paid. If he was unwilling to punish us, there was only one other option, punish himself. But it had to be more than just God, it had to be in our place. Just as the author says here, **“For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.”** Only by being both God and man would the problem be solved. And so he had to lower himself to be like us. He had to be born and live as us. And he deliberately chose to do so in a lowly way that would send a clear message to us all. The message that he is for us all, not the privileged. It’s a little harder for us to imagine in a society where class distinctions are more blurred, but if Jesus had been born the son of a king, the common folk would likely have paid no interest, assuming it had nothing to do with them. And as our substitute, in our place, Jesus did everything we should have done and then had to endure everything we deserved. That meant the suffering intended for us and the death that we should have died. By his substitution, we are forgiven.

And now, because of what God did entirely for us, what the author says here is true, **“Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.”** We are no longer enemies but family to God. That the God we offended and drove ourselves away from would do this for us is again unthinkable, but in the miracle of his work, he does. He draws us close to him and doesn’t just call us forgiven, but family. He loves us enough that he’s not just our Lord, he’s also our Father and our Brother.

And he does this in another unthinkable way. Since we cannot come to him, he must bring us to himself. He must change us to trust him. Our minds would create some elaborate ritual or show of power or quest or something of the like. God chose to use words. Just words. Freely available, easy to transmit, the perfect solution and yet beyond our imagination. And the last great miracle, that these words should somehow contain the power of the Holy Spirit himself that comes through these words to change a heart of hatred into a heart of love for God.

This has come to you, this is how you are saved. God has worked this miracle in your heart and caused you to believe in the miracles he has performed for you. The miracle of the incarnate Savior, the God become man who lived and died to set you free. Only by faith can you trust this. It is beyond normal human wisdom. And you have it. Give thanks to God that he has worked to give this to you, that he has revealed this truth to you. You are saved. And he didn’t do it in any way we would expect. That is a very good thing. As we bring our Christmas season to a close, rejoice in the miracles God has worked for you through the birth of Christ. Amen.