

Evergreen Christians

by Erlo Stegen

The sermon emphasizes the significance of Jesus' birth and the importance of preparing our hearts for him, highlighting the contrast between the darkness of the world and the light of God's presence in Jesus.

Duration: 1:11:53

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-21, Matthew 1:23, Matthew 2:2, Galatians 5:22-23, Revelation 20:4

Topics: "Fruitfulness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of preparing one's heart for Jesus. He asks the congregation if they have opened their hearts to Jesus, who is described as the Alpha and the Omega, Emmanuel, and God. The preacher also mentions the birth of Jesus and how it was a significant event during a dark era. He highlights the poverty of Mary and Joseph, and compares the reactions of different individuals, such as the wise men from the east and Herod, to the news of Jesus' birth. The sermon concludes with a call for personal transformation and a final song.

Transcript

So today is the day that we remember the birth of our Lord Jesus. And there are those who oppose it and say Christmas is definitely not the date and also the Christmas tree, all of that has got pagan origins. There are also some Christians who are very hostile against Christmas and say how can you have a Christmas tree and that and celebrate a heathen celebration.

But before I start to preach, let me just explain how things go. Now Christmas day used to be called a long time ago the day of Saturnalia in ancient days in Rome. It then spread to the eastern Mediterranean.

The first we hear of this particular celebration was found on the calendar, the Roman calendar, on the 25th of December. It was first celebrated, we hear of it for the first time in A.D. 354. After Christ, 354, where it was the remembrance of the birth of Jesus.

It had been a rival contender as the forerunner of the son, Saturnalia, Solus. It was the birthday of the son. It was about 274 where it had been an empire celebration.

It was also put onto the Roman coinage. As time increased and Christians began to expand, so they adopted it into Christendom not as the birth of the son but the birth of Christ. I'm just telling you some of the history.

Now the Christmas tree. But before I get there, let me just look at this point. There are those who say, how can we celebrate something that used to be a pagan festival and now make it a Christian one? There are many things that have got pagan origins but today are celebrated in a Christian fashion.

Jesus is known as the king, the king of kings. Now kings were originally a pagan notion. God's people never had kings.

When the Israelites began to desire a king, the prophet said, how can you do this? That which the pagan nation, the Gentiles do, they have kings. But today Jesus is king of kings. And where does it originate? It has a pagan origin.

There are other origins too of other facets but we wouldn't have time to look at it all. Now the Christmas tree. It came originally from Germany.

It is credited to Luther that he went outside one night and saw the stars in the heavens. He was awestruck by the beauty of it. He then went into his home and wanted to celebrate something with his family.

He took a fir tree from outside and cut it down, put it inside and decorated it with candles. In German it's called a tannenbaum. It used to be referred to as a fir tree.

Now in the ancient language, the fir referred to fire. The fire also being an ancient symbol for the spirit. But I also say the tree points upwards.

Now this tree is an evergreen. Now we don't recognise that so much because here in Africa trees are green anyway all the year round. But overseas there are some trees that lose their leaves.

There are those trees that lose their leaves down in the valleys, the thorn trees. In the rural, down in the valleys, that have thorns that hurt. But this one, this one, there are songs about it in German.

Which refer to it being green even in winter. When I first went to Germany, it was in winter, I looked at the forest and I said, what has there been a fire? They all look burnt. For many of the trees there do lose their leaves in winter.

Now across the whole of Europe. But this fir tree remains green always. And so the evergreens were considered to be representative of the burning fire of God in us.

And even in winter they continue to grow and be green. As we Christians should be continually doing. And so Luther would decorate it because a Christian should be one who's always in a sense decorated and made beautiful.

Do you know the beauty of the faith? Go and read in Galatians chapter five. The fruit of the Holy Spirit. Love.

Love? Had you said it already? Oh, I'm sorry. I don't hear so well. And patience.

I give you some homework in Galatians five. Look at from verse 19. You read the works of the flesh and you also read of the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

A Christian should be made beautiful all year round. Far more beautiful than the Christmas tree. Let me read it for you.

Galatians. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace. And patience.

Kindness. Goodness. Faithfulness.

Gentleness. Self-control. These fruits of the Spirit decorate the Christian far more attractive than the Christmas tree.

But you do get those that are not green, that lose their leaves. Jesus said he's the one who is green. The Lord said if they do this to me being a green branch, how much more to you who are a dry branch.

Greenness speaks of growth and growing. But dryness speaks of death. And the works of the dry tree are evident immorality, defilement, filth, idolatry, sorcery, witchcraft, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like this.

I warn you as I warned you before that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. So this tree speaks of the attractiveness of the Christian who is beautified and is attractive. Now I've said before that pagans originated this festival.

In their drunkenness and orgies, all the things, the sins of this world. Last night we know it as Christmas Eve or Sylvester. Now Sylvester being the first pope, he was a Pope Sylvester in the Roman Catholic Church from 314 to 335.

He saw the pagans being drunk, being immoral and all their filth. And he said, no, let's rather call it the Sylvester Day. And have a service.

That is why you have services on Christmas Eve. So you'll excuse me if I go into that history. The thing is there are those who are enemies of the gospel who object to these things.

But we on the 26th, we do not celebrate the birth of the son, but the birth of our son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And we use it to give and we tell about the birth of Jesus. But let me just leave it there.

I'll take too long if I to go into other details. Rather that one looks at it on another day. Before we now continue with our text.

I'd like to also mention this report that there are those still being Christians being beheaded by Muslims of the ISIS group in Iraq. Young Christian men have been brutally beheaded. They were all boys younger than 15.

For they, the ISIS tried to force them to reject Jesus and believe in Muhammad. All of these boys were under 15 years of age. They tried to force them to not follow Jesus anymore, but Muhammad.

But each one of these boys, all of them, all of them said, no, we love Jesus. Yes. We have always loved Yeshua.

We follow Yeshua. And Yeshua has been with us always. ISIS tried to force them to say the words that they reject their Christian faith and now follow Muhammad.

They firmly said, no, we cannot deny Yeshua. They chopped their heads off. What do you feel when you hear that? And you children under 15, what do you feel about this? These children are like our children.

We should have a feeling, a connection to this. Let us therefore remember them in prayer for it is said that daily they are being killed, raped, murdered. And women, they're Christian women being raped, murdered.

And these Christians say, you Christians in the world, what do you say about our suffering? And what are you doing about it? Let's pray for them now. That the Lord would be with them. Lord, we pray for these brethren who are being murdered, raped in these caliphate lands of ISIS.

Please be merciful to them. Rescue them. Work by your Holy Spirit, O Lord.

That these, our brothers and sisters, and these children who are our children, would experience you being close to them. Be gracious, Lord. Answer in a way that is far above even our asking and imagination in destroying the works of Satan.

Work, O Lord Jesus. You who have all power in heaven and on earth, wouldn't you work? We thank the Lord for His word, which declares that those who are beheaded for the faith are martyrs who are there at the closest place beneath the altar of God. If we meet up with such a circumstance, will we stand or will we deny the Lord Jesus? Let us now read our text in Matthew chapter 1. From verse 18, Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way, When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. We'll read thus far. Let's look closer at what happened at the birth of Jesus Christ.

Well, as we look in the manger, we say, here is a marvel, a wonderful child. We look at the animals there. The child, the Christ.

We find him there among the animals in a cow shed. Let's consider who Jesus was, who he is. Jesus is God himself.

And fully man as well. No one greater than him. No one older than him.

He is the very first. We find the creator of heaven and earth in a manger with animals around. No one greater than him.

And yet we find him so small, so little. No one who has been made as small as he was. He who is the very first.

We find him here being the lowest of the low. How is it possible that the most high God, the greatest, should be the smallest of all? Leaving heaven to come to earth. He who had made the heavens and the earth.

He who has everything in his hands. We see him in an animal manger. Born of a person, Mary.

Historians estimate that Mary might have been 16 or 17. We could call her a child still. And it is a Jewish custom that girls till today get married very young, even 17.

The most high God, the Alpha and the Omega, is born as a child. A child of a person. It is indescribable.

Words cannot explain it. Great is this mystery. The birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

His birth was during a dark era. The mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph. Both of them being poor.

For the lineage of David, though he had been king, it had become so low that that lineage was now very poor. Joseph should have received the scepter of being a king, but he was nothing. And not that being poor is something to look down upon.

No, there are poor people who live far better lives than the rich. The man who was to be his stepfather, who was just a carpenter and also poor. I say it is a dark era.

Not because of their poverty. It was dark for him, for he was now betrothed to this girl, Mary. At that time, it was not allowed that a girl falls pregnant outside of wedlock.

In fact, they would have been stoned, both the girl and the man. And today, though, we don't know what virginity is anymore. You find it is just a lost value.

Jews were not like the Gentiles. If a Jewish family then would get engaged, they would go with the family to the home of the girl. And at the betrothal ceremony, the man was given a cup.

And so the bridegroom would drink from this cup. Then it would be given to her. And if they had now both drunk from the same cup, it was declared to be their betrothal or engagement.

It was an expression of being one, unity. Of being joined together. When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, he prayed, let this cup pass from me.

It was when he was sweating sweat drops of blood. As he drank. He was drinking of your filth, all your sins.

He was joining himself, uniting himself to you, engaging. He got engaged to you in all your sinfulness. Because being betrothed to you with all your filth, it made him to sweat as he drank this cup.

Jesus did this. Now it was a custom of the Jews in their betrothal. Then after that ceremony, the young man would go home.

There was no visitation. No connection with SMSs. There was no phoning of each other.

They were parted like the Easter's from the West. Even when Mary went to visit her relative Elizabeth in the hills, she didn't ask for permission from her engaged man and say, what do you think? Is it okay? Today we do that before we are married. And when we are married, we behave as if we are not married.

Things have been turned upside down. That's why there is such rottenness in this world. When the bridegroom would go home, he would start with building a home for his wife to be.

When he had finished building it, he wouldn't say, now father, I'm going to fetch my wife. He would wait upon his father who would then choose the day. Now, son, you can go and fetch your bride.

That is why Jesus said, I go now to prepare a home for you. And no man knows the hour, only the father. Until the father said that he could go and fetch his bride.

So Mary and Joseph were not visiting each other or writing love letters. At that time, Mary was visited by an angel saying, you will bear a son. She said, how can this be? For I know no man.

I've not been touched by man. I'm a virgin. The angel said, the Holy Spirit will overshadow you.

And through the Holy Spirit, you will be pregnant with a son. Think about it. It was a disgrace for a girl to fall pregnant at home.

Worthy of execution. It was not allowed. But Mary said, behold, I am your maid servant.

Let it be as you have said. She was willing to bear this disgrace of falling pregnant. She didn't say, but what will Joseph think of me? Because remember, pregnancy might be hidden in the beginning, but later on it becomes publicly evident.

Then after a while, Joseph got wind of the fact that she was pregnant. Whether he saw or he heard rumors, because there is gossiping in this world. Jesus was born in a dark, difficult time.

This is the darkness that he was born in this circumstance. Had to say it was his, their child. For they both lived a life of purity that was a sweet fragrance to God.

It was dark for she fell pregnant out of wedlock. How difficult it was for Joseph to have thought, I have never dreamed that this girl that I've got betrothed to should fall pregnant like this at home. God told Joseph, The Bible says Joseph was a just man, not willing to expose her to open shame.

He didn't go around and tell people, I've had a terrible thing happen to me. The girl I'm engaged to has fallen pregnant. He was truly an upright man, a just man, a man who stood out in 10,000 men.

He said, I don't want to expose her to open shame so that she would be executed. He decided to rather let their divorce or their parting be in secret and that it just disappears. Not wanting to expose her to disgrace and to be found guilty.

This is what destroys us. This disgrace among Christians of gossip known that it was among women, but men too now are exactly the same. Men have degraded.

They're worse than a silly woman. They can't keep a secret. They must speak gossip.

It was pitch dark for him. God sent an angel and then said to Joseph, don't be afraid to take her as your wife, for this thing which has happened to her is of God. It is of the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son. You will call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins. While she was still a virgin, a pure virgin.

Remember that point. Though a virgin, nothing is impossible for God, for he could create the child in her. It was said, now go and fetch your bride.

Now it was the Father in heaven speaking to Joseph. We don't know if his earthly father was still alive then. But now let's look at how the darkness changed.

He then went. She said then to him, God sent his angel to me and said that I will bear a son, Jesus. And she could then share with him how God had come to her and said she would bear a son, the Messiah.

So they went home. And took her to there where he had built a home for her. They were happy, they were joyful, none as happy as they were.

Joseph though had no intimate relations with her until she bore him, bore a son. Honoring her and the child in her, the Messiah, the Christ, the King of kings. Marvelous it is.

And then right there. The emperor in Rome then declared that there would be a poll or a census. Every person in his empire was to be counted.

Like we know what a census is. First time. Why? Mary was far in her pregnancy.

It was close to the time. Then they had to get up and go far to Bethlehem. A person might say, what, this is so typical of a king, having such unjust, unfair laws.

Oh, the Roman slavery. Oh, the Roman dictatorship. But God, who is sovereign over all things, was sovereign even over this circumstance because of the child.

For he had to be born in Bethlehem and they were still in Nazareth. You see how God's ways are? They are so wrong. Jesus, when he walked this earth, he came at the wrong time.

When a person says, my father has died. I've just got married. I've just bought some oxen.

Jesus was always come to you at the wrong so-called wrong time. Don't be fooled by the devil. It isn't wrong.

It's right because God doesn't make a mistake. So, when they got there, now I'm just summarizing. It's just about time to stop.

But I'll just carry on a bit. When they got there, he didn't arrive with a sceptre of a king coming in poverty as a nothing. And they saw Mary in them in this state.

And Mary in this far pregnancy was told, sorry, no room here. There was no bed and breakfast, no hotel, no place for them. Such as man without pity, selfish at heart, not thinking of the other, only thinking of himself.

Until they were finally given a place in a stable. No bed. Just a manger for cows.

For animals. We don't hear Mary and Joseph complaining. But God in heaven was busy engineering circumstances to fulfill what had been declared in the Bible.

Things are going wrong. They're not going wrong. It's God who's maneuvering things.

God doesn't God doesn't make a mistake. We try and correct things and try and maneuver things ourselves. Then we mess up.

We should just be silent and let God work. Then to the stable, which was usually at below a building. No electricity.

It had no facilities. But Joseph takes this hay and makes a bed in the manger. A child is born.

Joseph being the midwife. But no greater than this. Jesus, God himself.

How amazing is the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ? Mary wrapped him in swaddling clothes and lay him in a manger. They gazed upon this baby in awe, remembering that he is the Emmanuel. He is God with us.

No greater than he is. Didn't take long and shepherds arrived. Wanting to see the child who had been born, the king.

A marvel among marvels. And Mary and Joseph were continually in awe. How marvelous it is.

The Christmas story. Nothing, no story greater than it is. See, see, see.

There is no greater gift than this. Doesn't matter how big a present you might receive at Christmas. Nothing bigger than this.

Now make him a place a manger let get this place ready for Jesus Have you prepared your heart for Jesus Jesus he who is the Alpha and the Omega Have you prepared your heart for him he who is Immanuel he who is God I don't ask you about your sins of sorcery or drunkenness whatever but have you now come to that point that you say Jesus in my heart Immanuel God with me I'll have to stop now I've spoken long enough This matter cannot be described amply in just an hour or an hour and a half I want to know from you be truthful and honest have you opened your heart to this child Wise men from the east far east most probably China they've been touched they've come what has Christ his birth done to you yet Has it moved you Or are you rather like Herod and all Jerusalem who with the rumor of the birth of the king were troubled but tell me who are you like are you identified with the wise men from the east perhaps as far as China and also the shepherds those who were touched by his birth or are you rather like Herod if you have received Jesus in your life don't tell me that you remain unchanged I would be glad if these words have not been in vain to you Is the choir still here come forward and sing a final song

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