

SERMON-DECEMBER 26, 2021

Title: **His Birthday Forever!** **Rev. Ted Althouse**

Texts: **Ephesians 2:13-20** **First Sunday In Epiphany/Christmastide**

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[13] But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. [14] For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, [15] by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, [16] and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. [17] He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. [18] For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.[19] Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, [20] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. [21] In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. [22] And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Ephesians 2:13-20)

The year 2021 is about to become history and was a difficult year for us all as we navigated through the COVID pandemic and still continue moving forward with many issues that confront us all. Also, for many of us we may have lost a member of our family or friend as they entered into the Kingdom of Heaven. But here we are today about ready to stand on the threshold of another new year…hopefully with many great and positive expectations as well as good health? Each and every year we come to this time when we say goodbye to the past year and then move forward into the future. For all of us who believe that God created the world and everything in it, we should not fear the future year because we believe that God brought to this world the greatest gift that mankind will ever experience...the birth of his son Jesus Christ who is with us through his Holy Spirit to guide, direct and comfort us. And furthermore, as a dedicated Christian, it is this birth of Jesus Christ that is the most important occurrence ever to happen and we cannot and must not allow Christ's birth, his life, his death and his resurrection be minimized in any manner. Scripture tells us that whoever will come unto him will have life eternal. This gift of eternal life is far more important than any physical change of any new calendar year. Physical time lines will continue and bring about some changes...but the opportunity to have a spiritual heavenly life after physical death, is (or should be) the most sought-after prize for every living human being.

Just a few hours ago, we celebrated a very special birthday. Not just "a" birthday but "the" birth-day of the son of Almighty God...Jesus Christ...the Messiah...the Lord and Savior for all humankind. I think we all realize that for the majority of the time, birthdays are only celebrated on one special day...the physical birth-day of that individual and is often quickly forgotten until the next year rolls around. Then along comes December 25th each year and we often want to celebrate too much of the secular side of that special birthday that took place on that day in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago. Unfortunately, many individuals do not place the emphasis on the real reason we celebrate this birthday of Jesus Christ. Also, what is even more sad is that some people move right past it and begin to forget the real and significant reason for celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ until the next year when we begin the Christmas celebration process all over again. Therefore, I say to you, it is every Christian's obligation to think about Christ's birth daily throughout the entire year.
As a Christian church, there is a structure to help remind us of Christ's birth throughout the year. We have what is called the Christian liturgical calendar year. The Christian liturgical year came into being during the Roman era of the early Catholic church. It remains a positive way to demonstrate and remember the various events of Christ's life throughout each year. Over the years, the Christian liturgical calendar, has been more defined and divided into what we call "seasons" celebrating the birth, life and death of Christ. It gives us a constant reminder of who Christ is and his special connection to each of us personally.

The Christian liturgical seasons begins with the season of Advent (which means anticipation and arrival of a special person or event…in this case Jesus Christ). Advent is a four-week period that prepares us with anticipation for the celebration of the birth of Christ which is the day when the divine Almighty God revealed himself to the world, through his only son who came into this world as a human baby...to grow into a man. This man called Jesus of Nazareth lead a few hand-picked followers (disciples) to begin a new directive of a spiritual belief system called "Cristianos" (Greek word) today known as Christianity. In 313 AD, the Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, which established Christianity: 10 years later, it had become the official religion of the Roman Empire. I'm sure you realize that if we didn't have the birth of Jesus Christ, there would not be any Christian church in the world and you and I would not be here today.

Now, after the season of Advent, we enter into 8 weeks of the manifestation/appearance of Christ's birthday celebration known as Epiphany (also referred to as Christmastide). This is the time when, following Christ's birth, the Christian world is presented or introduced to the Christ child and his importance. Epiphany/Christmastide is defined as: *a celebration of the manifestation of the divine nature of Jesus Christ to the gentiles."* And the definition of manifestation is: *to show or demonstrate ...to reveal."* So, during Epiphany/Christmastide we are demonstrating and revealing to the world who Jesus Christ really is today and his importance in the world forever. This understanding makes us all become his apostles...his disciples...his teachers.
Then the next five weeks after Epiphany/Christmastide is the pre-death 40-day period of Christianity known as Lent. This is when we reflect upon and prepare ourselves for the crucifixion of Christ. Lent is a time for serious introspection of our own life...just as Jesus did during the 40 days in the desert.

Lent also leads us to the celebration of Palm Sunday remembering the triumphal entry of Jesus Christ into the city of Jerusalem for the last time of his physical life on earth and his last supper/meal with his disciples. This is a time for the Christian to feel a sense of somber joy sensing Christ's own frame of mind as he contemplated the end of his earthly life and his terrible death on the cross. Quickly following Palm Sunday is a day known as Maundy Thursday when Christ ate his last meal with his disciples and was betrayed. Good Friday is the next day and the physical death of Christ on the cross. Good Friday is also a time for the Christian to move into personal moments of reflection upon the life and death of Jesus...just like he did in the Garden of Gethsemane. It is also a time to personally reflect on our own future dimension of life and death. Immediately following Good Friday are three days of contemplation and mourning as we move into Easter Sunday and joyfully celebrate the glorious and highly significant resurrection day of Jesus Christ from the grave of physical death. On this same day he later appearing to many people in the flesh…resurrected alive human form.

Then our Christian calendar takes us into the season of 50-day Eastertide when we recall the significance of Christ's resurrection and the meaning and importance of having the living Christ always with us in the form of his unseen Holy Spirit. Eastertide brings us to Pentecost Sunday and back to the beginning of the season of Lent. So, you can see that the Christian year has us continually recalling and remembering the importance of the birth and life and death of Jesus Christ. The Christian liturgical seasons of the year are reminders that affirms that we are to be remembering the birthday of the son of God, Jesus Christ, everyday...everyday throughout the year ...and not just one day of the year.

The apostle Paul's writings also help us remember and remind us about Christ's birthday in his letter to the Ephesian people, listen; "*But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ."* (v13) The birth and life of Christ was and is so significant that a new church of believers was formed out of both gentile and Jew as they came to an understanding of Christ's mission and by a continued remembrance of Christ's original birthday as well as his crucifixion. These two main acts (Christ's birth and resurrection) have given the world a choice...a choice to be or not to be with Christ...and in his favor. This is not a halfway choice...it is a choice of yes or no. Paul tells us that once we were far away (meaning life separated from the goodness of Jesus Christ) but then he is reminding us that it is through the sacrificed blood of Christ and his gift of the Holy Spirit, that now brings us together as one with him. The Holy Sacrament of Communion/Eucharist is one significant act for everyone to remember and recall Christ life and his sacrificed death…which he did for each of us.

Paul tells us something else important: *"For through him we both have access to the father by one Spirit*." (v18) Wow! This is really significant: *"through him we all have access to the father...by one Spirit"*. What great news to receive and believe as we approach the 2022 New Year? What I'm about to say is equally very important, so please listen closely*:* It is only through the unseen Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ that we can have this coveted privilege of mercy, grace and forgiveness of our sins…and eventual eternal life*.* Every person in this world has the liberty to approach Almighty God especially

through his son Jesus Christ at any time...and we can do this as we continue to celebrate his birthday everyday throughout the year. Christ paved the way and opened the door to eternal life through his birth and his death…please never ever forget this truth. It is the Holy Spirit of Christ that lives within us and gives us a reason to move forward in a positive direction each and every day.

When this realization takes place, Paul says this happens; "*Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people."* (v19) Let me repeat that for you to hear again. When we accept the call and invitation to follow Jesus Christ, we become a part of Almighty God's special world. We become citizens of God's spiritual world and are a part of God's people...his earthly family. We are no longer strangers anywhere because the family of God is the greatest household known and any individual can be a part of this great family of God if he/she wants to. It takes a commitment to accept Jesus Christ as your personal savior.

Paul says; *"...built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself...as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a Holy Temple in the Lord."* (20-21) This is another important message as we move into the new year. Every building has a stabilizing link of some kind…a foundation...a cornerstone that is important to keep that building together for stability. For the born-again Christian, Jesus Christ is that stabilizing link for us. He is our foundation...our cornerstone. Jesus is that all important link that keeps us firmly together as the stabilizing force especially in this present unstable world. Our faith, our hope, our trust is built upon Christ. Christ is and always will be the solid foundation that keeps us together and provides a positive temple (dwelling place) for each us.

So, my dear friends, as we move into another new year, may we remember that Christ continues to go with us if we want him too. Therefore, we must celebrate Christ's birthday every day...not only a few days ago, but today and tomorrow and forever. And to help us remember how important Christ's birthday is...let's do something different...let's sing happy birthday to Jesus.

