

Hebrews 10:5-10

What is **Christmas** to you? That's a simple **question**, but the **answer** isn't as simple as it may seem to be. To each of us Christmas is **many** things. For example, it is a **season** - a joyous time filled with warmth and goodness. It's also **food** - like roast turkey or ham, as well as all the special holiday breads and cookies and candies. Christmas is also **decorations** - the trees, wreaths, and garland; the lights and ornaments; the holly and mistletoe; even the stockings hung by the chimney with care. Oh yes, there are also the **presents**, and the **cards** and **letters** filled with warm wishes during the holidays. And certainly there are the **memories** - memories of all the Christmases gone by - memories of the children in the Christmas Eve worship service - memories of our families happy and together.

But of course for us as Christians, Christmas is **more** - **much** more - it is the **birthday** of our **Savior**. Every year on Christmas Eve and again on Christmas Day, we have the opportunity to hear the account of the **birth** of our Lord Jesus Christ. Without a doubt, the most familiar account of that event is recorded for us by St. Luke, in the second chapter of his Gospel. Matthew and John also add a few details for us in their Gospels. One by one, we could take the people who were involved in the Christmas story off to the side, and they would each be able to relate the Lord's birth from their perspective. First of all, there was **Joseph**, who had been visited in a dream by the Angel Gabriel. Certainly we would be interested in hearing more details about that part of the Christmas account. And even though he was a carpenter and not a doctor, since no one else was there, Joseph probably had the privilege of **delivering** the Baby Jesus. Maybe we wouldn't want too many details about that. Secondly, there was **Mary**. She would be able to tell us about Gabriel's appearance to her, and about her visit with her cousin Elizabeth, as well as about the actual experience of giving birth, and the unusual visit from the shepherds. Then there were the **shepherds** themselves. They would be able to provide us with even more information. After all, they were the ones who had seen and heard the multitude of angels out in the fields of Bethlehem. Perhaps they would also be able to tell us about some of the results which occurred when they went to tell others about all the things they had heard and seen. But wouldn't it be interesting to hear the account of the Christmas story from the lips of our Lord Jesus **Himself**? Well, that's what we're going to do this morning, as we consider **The Christmas Story, According To Jesus**.

Our text begins, "*When Christ came into the world, He said, 'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You prepared for Me.'*" The first thing

which Jesus talks about in His account of the Christmas story is the concept of **sacrifice**. In the Old Testament, animals were sacrificed on the altar, and were then presented to God as sin offerings and burnt offerings. In keeping with the requirements of the law, day after day, and year after year, the people would bring lambs, and bulls, and goats to be sacrificed, in the hope that through this action, they would have their sin and guilt removed. But it didn't work. It was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, the people still felt **guilty**, and they still needed to continue to bring **more** sacrifices.

In His account of the Christmas story, Jesus explains to us that these sacrifices were not what God **desired**, even though it was God who had **required** such sacrifices in the first place. What God desired was a **perfect** sacrifice - the sacrifice of a perfect **life** - a sacrifice **freely** offered. It was that sacrifice which **Jesus** was born on earth to bring, and He was the **only** one who could bring it. Unlike anyone else who has ever been born, Jesus was not only a true **man**, but He was also true **God**. Both the divine and the human nature of Jesus were **necessary** for Him to be our Savior. Jesus had to be **divine**, so that He would be able to live a **perfect** life, and thus earn salvation for **all** people. But Jesus also had to be **human**, so that He could **suffer** and **die**, and thus pay the price which God had required for our release from the bonds of sin.

The story is told of a young soldier, who served many years ago in the Russian army. Because his father was a friend of the czar, Nicholas I, this young man had received the privilege of being the **paymaster** in one of the barracks. Unfortunately, even though he meant well, the young man's character was not very strong. He got hooked on **gambling**, and before he knew it, he had gambled away a great deal of the **government's** money, as well as his **own**. It didn't take long before it was noticed that the money was **missing**. So, the young man received notice that one of the czar's representatives was coming to check his accounts. The young man knew he was in very deep **trouble**.

Immediately he got out the financial records to actually **total up** for himself the amount which he owed to the government. Then he went to his safe, and took out everything he had left - which wasn't much at all. As he compared his astronomical **debt** with his pitiful **resources**, he was completely **overwhelmed**. He was **ruined**! He knew that he would be **disgraced**. In great despair he wrote at the bottom of the ledger, "My debt is **too great**. Who can every **pay** it?" Day turned to night as this despondent man fretted over his impending doom, until

finally he **fell asleep**, completely exhausted.

As this man lay sleeping, **another** man came through the barracks. It was the **czar** himself making the rounds, as he frequently did. He **recognized** his friend's son, **saw** the open ledger, and **realized** what had been going on. Then he noticed the message which had been written at the bottom of the ledger: "My debt is too great. Who can ever pay it?" And without waking the man, the czar reached over, wrote down **one word**, and then slipped out again.

When the young man woke up the next morning, he decided he would **end** his own life. He figured it would be easier to **kill** himself than to bear all the **shame** and **disgrace** which his stealing would bring upon him. But, as the man reached for his gun, he noticed the **ledger**, and he saw something he hadn't seen before. There at the bottom of his message was that **one word**. Can you guess what it was? It was the czar's **signature** - **Nicholas**. The young man realized that his **king** had **read** the ledger - that he **knew** everything - and that he was willing to **pay** the entire debt in his place. The debt was **so great**, that only the **czar** could pay it - and the czar **did** pay it.

The significance of that story is not **lost** on us, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of **Jesus**. Our text concludes, "*(Jesus said), 'Here I am - it is **written** about Me in the **scroll** - I have come to do **Your will**, O God.'*" Jesus came to the earth to do **God's** will, and the Bible clearly tells us that it is God's will for "*all men to be **saved**, and to come to a knowledge of the **truth**.*" Jesus came to **pay** the **debt** of our sins - to offer His **perfect** life as payment in **full**. It was a debt **so great**, that only **Jesus** could pay it - and Jesus **did** pay it. Jesus was **born** to **die**. Sometimes we lose **track** of that fact as we celebrate Christmas. We get so wrapped up in the **birth** of our Savior, that we forget about God's ultimate **purpose** for that birth. The birth and death of Jesus are intimately **tied together**. Without His **death**, there would be no **reason** for His birth.

Another thing which it is important for us to remember as we prepare for Christmas Day, is that Jesus did all this for us **willingly**. There are many places in the Bible where we hear that the Lord was **satisfied** in His ministry. But here we read that He was **more** than satisfied - He was **delighted** to do God's will. Imagine that. Jesus was **delighted** - to **leave** heaven and come to the earth. He was **delighted** - to **lay aside** all His rights and privileges as the eternal and almighty Son of God, and to become like us. Jesus was **delighted** - to be **poor**, to **suffer** and

struggle throughout His life, and then eventually even to **die** on the cross - all because it was His Father's will. It was His **delight** to bring **us** into the eternal joys of heaven.

Is it any wonder that the **angels** sang for **joy** at His birth? Is it any wonder that **we also** sing for joy - not because of all the gifts we give to and receive from one another - but because of the Gift which we received from our **God**! And there's still one more important point for us to consider today. When Jesus said, "*Here I am - it is written about Me in the scroll,*" He used the **present** tense. The Christmas story is just as alive **today** as it was when it first took place, some 2,000 years ago - whether it is told by **Mary**, or **Joseph**, or the **shepherds**, or even by **Jesus Himself**. Jesus is **present** for us in His Word and in the Sacraments, bringing us **peace** with God, and **joy** for eternity. Let us **rejoice** in the birth of our Savior, recognizing that everything He came to bring, is **still ours** today, and **will be** ours forever. Amen.