

A Red Christmas
Luke 3:23-38

Brothers and sisters, as we are now well into the Christmas season with only 10 shopping days left, we face the challenge of what to get “that certain someone” for Christmas.

There’s always that certain person on your gift list who is just so difficult to buy for – whether its because they are unappreciative, or seem to have so few interests or hobbies, or they already seem to have everything.

Now before the advent of online shopping the solution to such gift buying dilemma could be found in the back-pocket of an airline seat. Perhaps you remember passing the time on a long flight by pulling out the Hammacher Schlemmer gift catalogue, looking through it and being amazed by all the unique gifts that you could only purchase in this magazine.

You just couldn’t find things like heated ear-muffs with built in stereophonic hi-fidelity headphones anywhere else... or blankets that had sleeves built in, or remote-control storage

pouches that fit on our couches – or the world’s brightest and most indestructible flashlight!

Here, in this gift catalogue was the salvation for your gift buying dilemma, here you could find gifts for the person who already had everything – because they couldn’t possibly already have an infrared fondue set with matching skewers!

But as the internet and online information became more and more accessible and commonplace not only did the Hammacher Schlemmer gift catalogue move online, another gift option for that “certain someone” also became available.

I can’t exactly remember when I first saw it advertised but suddenly you could buy a family history online from Ancestry.com. You would input your current information and perhaps your parent’s biographical information and then Ancestry.com would search through all sorts of online databases and historical catalogues and give you as much information as they could gather about your ancestors and who was in your family tree.

And with the recent scientific advances in mapping DNA you can go one step further now and send in your DNA and they will tell you what particular racial mix you are and where your predominant racial heritage originates from.

Now its fascinating and interesting to find out who your ancestors were and whose DNA you are carrying around in your genes but I think the desire to discover this information goes beyond simple curiosity – because as human beings we have an innate drive to know who we are and where we come from... it's a significant part of our identity.

And while western society has for many many many years championed the ideal that we are all self-made individuals free to determine our own identities and who we want to be – drawing solely from our own person - apart from any external influences or persuasion... many Westerners are now – rather ironically - looking outside themselves and to their ancestors and their land of origin to help give them a sense of identity and self-understanding.

And I bring this up brothers and sisters because just as Ancestry.com attempts to help us solve both the first-world dilemma of what to give that certain someone for Christmas and our more existential dilemma of who we are and what our purpose and place is in this world, Luke's genealogy list that we read this morning also speaks to the deep questions of life – especially questions about what is wrong with the world and what God has been doing to try to save it.

And the way in which this genealogy reveals God as a saving God and how this is leads to and is fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ is what having a Red Christmas is all about – so let's turn to Luke 3:21 and let's take a closer look at this passage.

Now the first thing you might be wondering is what does Jesus' baptism have to do with Christmas? Haven't we skipped a bit too far ahead in the story?

Well brothers and sisters I'm going to suggest that since this baptism and genealogy passage puts a great deal of emphasis on "father-son" relationships - and by virtue of its proximity to

Luke's account of Jesus' birth in the previous chapter that it is still meant to be connected to Jesus' birth.

And... you may not realize that Jesus' baptism is one of the main factors for why celebrate Jesus' birth on December 25th - now, I'm just going to leave that there as a teaser and if you want to know more about how that all worked out... you can checkout Valleyview's sermon archives from December 2017 and get the full message on that.

Now you should notice that Luke's description of Jesus' baptism is very short – both in length, its only two verses and on the details that we are familiar with from the other gospels – in fact Luke doesn't even mention that John the Baptist is the one who baptizes Jesus.

And that's because Luke wants to summarize the purpose of Jesus' baptism so that it defines the purpose of his genealogy. For Luke this is the occasion of Jesus' public commissioning and empowerment for His ministry of salvation - by the Holy

Spirit – and its when God the Father publicly acknowledges Jesus as His Son for this purpose.

Now this has a couple layers to it – on the surface it confirms that Jesus was, as Luke recounts in the previous chapter, conceived by the Holy Spirit so that Yahweh is His father – though everyone would have thought him to be conceived by Joseph as Luke mentions in vs. 23

So why Luke would seem to follow this misconception and trace Joseph's lineage in the genealogy?

But this is why its important to understanding the next layer of God acknowledging Jesus as "His Son" means, and its not so much a confirmation of Jesus' divine nature as a confirmation of His title that He will assume in God's saving plan

In fact, understanding this nuance in the title "the Son of God" is also important in understanding how Satan is going to tempt Jesus in the desert – which occurs in the next chapter in Luke's gospel – but that would be too far ahead for Christmas.

Rather we need to go back... back into the history of God's saving plan to see where this title has already been used and what it is connected with, and this is why Luke begins to list Joseph's ancestors and take us back in time.

So our first stop in Luke's genealogy is at a very recognizable name in this list - David. King -David.

As we learned last week God had made a covenant promise to King David in 2 Samuel 7:12-14 and this is also where we find God calling the King of Israel "His Son". God says *"I will raise up your offspring to succeed you [David]... I will be his father, and he will be **my son**."*

David also speaks of this relationship that the King of Israel has with God in Ps 7:2 *"He (Yahweh) said to me, "You are **my son**; today I have become your father."*

So "the Son of God" is a title that refers to the King of Israel, and all the promises and responsibilities that go along with that – most notably to lead God's people to be faithful in their

covenant relationship with God as defined by the Law of Moses. Thus, Jesus' baptism is also His coronation.

Now speaking of God's people, as we travel further back through the list we come to Judah the son of Jacob the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham.

These men are the patriarchs of the Covenant people of God. Judah is father of one of the most prominent tribes in all of Israel. Jacob is the father of all 12 tribes – and his name was changed to Israel after he had wrestled with God. His father Isaac – was the son of the promise, miraculously born to Abraham at an impossible old age – this came up last week as an example of how Mary would conceive Jesus as a virgin.

And father Abraham – the man of faith, whom God promised to make into a great nation and give his descendants the promised land. But Abraham had to wait for the promise and his descendants would as well – God foretold Abraham that they would first endure a time of slavery in a foreign land before the promise of land was fulfilled.

And the people of Israel ended up in Egypt because Jacob's sons sold their brother to slavery in Egypt, and eventually those circumstances led to the whole family moving there reuniting and prospering into a great people. But over time the Pharaohs came to fear them and enslaved them.

And it is in the context of God's delivering Israel from Egypt and saving them that we find the next reference to the title "Son of God" in Exodus 4:22 God tells Moses "say to Pharaoh, 'This is what Yahweh says: Israel is **my firstborn son**'" and in Hosea 11:1 we read "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called **my son**."

So we see from this that "the son of God" is also a title for the people of Israel, the nation of Israel with all the promises and responsibilities that go along with that.

We think of all the promises that were part of the Covenant that God made with Abraham and all the responsibilities that were outlined as part of the Covenant of Law.

And Israel had a special role to play in God's plan of salvation, God tells them in Exodus 19:5-6 "*out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*"

And in Isaiah 42:6 God says "*I, the LORD, have called you for a righteous purpose... I will keep you and appoint you to be a covenant for the people and a light to the nations*"

So the "Son of God" - the nation of Israel - was to mediate God's presence to the nations around them and to shine the light of God's law through their obedience and worship so the nations could see who God was and respond correctly to Him.

Through Israel God is revealing Himself to be a saving God – not only in saving Israel - but also offering His salvation to the nations as well.

So... Luke wants us to see that Jesus' baptism is also Jesus becoming everything that Israel was always supposed to be –

a holy set-apart nation, a light to the nations and a royal priest who mediates God's presence to us.

You see this is why it says in Hebrews 5:5 *"Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father."*

Ok – so can you see how the "son of God" title is taking us back through this genealogy here and connecting us to the major points in God's saving plan?

That's good because its not done yet – we're going waaaaay back in the genealogy to Noah and the flood and God's Covenant of Preservation, because that's the next place we find a reference to the "son or sons of God." It's Genesis 6:2 where it reads *"**the sons of God** saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose."*

Now these "sons of God" in Genesis are the men who belong to what I call "the line of the woman – Eve" and they are set in

contrast in Gen 4-6 to those who belong to "the line of the serpent – Satan."

The first few chapters of Genesis are somewhat sparse on the details of how this played out but essentially the sons of God, the line of the women were those men who were faithful to God and worshiped Him and rejected the rebellion that Satan had instigated and rejected those who had joined that rebellion and looked forward to the promised child that would crush the head of the serpent. (Gen 3:15)

But Gen 6:2 describes how these faithful men failed to stay separate and they ended up marrying into the line of the serpent and as a result sinfulness and wickedness increase exponentially and God regrets creating humans and resolved to destroy all life in the flood – saving only Noah and his family and the animals on the ark.

So, the title of "son(s) of God" also connects us to Noah and the favor He found with God so that through Noah there was

salvation from the waters of destruction and the preservation of life instead and a new beginning.

Additionally, when God made His covenant of Preservation with Noah, He promised that even though the heart of man was always inclined towards evil, He would never again destroy the creation and designated His rainbow as a symbol of His intention to give His plan of salvation enough time – many years and generations – to be worked out and come to fulfillment and completion and not allow human sinfulness to derail it.

That's why 1 Peter 3:20-21 says *“God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also...”*

So Luke wants us to connect Jesus' baptism to Noah's salvation through the waters of the flood and to the preservation of the creation for its eventual restoration because this is also part of being “the Son of God.”

But there is one more reference to the “Son of God” and we find it right here at the end of the genealogy in 3:38 where Luke calls Adam ***the son of God***.

Here we learn that the title of “Son of God” also carries within it the “the Image of God” for Adam, as we know from Gen 2:27 was created in the Image of God, male and female, to rule over the creation.

And so Luke wants us to see Jesus' baptism as the re-creation of a 2nd Adam, not made from the dust – but brought out of the water and filled with the Life of the Holy Spirit - this is why Luke's account of Jesus baptism is still connected to His birth.

So the “Son of God” is a title for the second Adam – God's re-creation of a representative for all humanity who can undo what was done by Adam. Thus Paul writes in Romans 5:17 *“For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!”*

Brothers and sisters, this genealogy is a record, a reference, of God's saving work throughout Human history as it is recorded in the scriptures. In this we see how God has always revealed himself as a Saving God and Luke wants us to see how this is most fully and completely revealed in the birth of Jesus Christ.

So this is what a Red Christmas is all about – the Son of God is born and brings about the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation and as we are connected to Jesus Christ through our being "immersed" or baptized into Him – the Holy Spirit applies this salvation to our lives and we to experience it.

So brothers and sisters here are five ways we can experience Jesus fulfilling God's covenant plan of salvation in the birth of Jesus Christ – the Son of God.

As Jesus fulfill David's Covenant of Kingship – He saves us from the tyranny of sin in our life and He rules over us instead.

Now brothers and sisters, if you didn't know already, there are many reasons why anger, lust, greed, envy, sloth, gluttony and pride are called **deadly** sins.

I'm sure all of us can recall instances in our lives where these deadly sins are running things and calling the shots – and it seems that Christmas is actually one of those times where they so easily get back into the driver's seat in our lives, and maybe you are struggling with that as you anticipate how your family just seems to make you angry at the annual Christmas gathering, or gluttony always gets the better of you as you have too much to eat and drink...

Brothers and sisters the good news is that we are saved from the tyranny of these sins and Jesus reigns over us instead. Hear the saving word of God in scripture and believe it and put it into practice - Titus 2:11-12 *"For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age."*

Now brothers and sisters – sometimes we need to do more than just say no and the good news is that as Jesus fulfills Israel’s covenant of Law we are saved from ignorance and disobedience to live in grateful obedience towards God.

As Paul exhorts us in Romans 12:1 through Jesus we can *“offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is our true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Then we will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

And brothers and sisters we do not have to go through this alone. We know all too well that sin and its consequences breaks down relationships, isolates us, leaves us wandering around looking for stability and security - but as Jesus fulfills Abraham’s Covenant of Promise we are saved from this isolation and brought into a great nation – the Body of Christ!

In the body of Christ we have belonging, identity, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and encouragement that helps to

heal and bring wholeness where sin has ravaged us. As James 5:16 says *“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”*

Now – this is really good news so far right?

But, I know – and I believe you do to – that we experience some major set-backs in our salvation from time to time. Maybe we get stuck in some terrible temptations or addictions... maybe we experience a personal tragedy and have a crisis of faith... whatever it maybe it seems that we fall back under the power of sin in our life.

But brothers and sisters – be encouraged and do not be afraid of such trials when they come. The good news is that as Jesus fulfills Noah’s covenant of Preservation – we can be assured that not only are we saved from God’s wrath regarding our sin – but we can be confident that God will make and take whatever time it takes to complete our

salvation! His plan won't stop due to our sinfulness – that's His covenant promise – and its ours in Jesus Christ.

As Paul declares in Phil 1:6 *“that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”*

And we can look forward to that day brothers and sisters – not just because we will be see our Lord Jesus face to face – but because as Jesus fulfills Adam's covenants with God He becomes the offspring who crushes the head of the serpent and when Christ returns Satan will be destroyed and all evil and sin will be burned out of the creation and it will be made new! A new heaven and a new earth!

And not only will we live forever in the presence of God – we will be glorified, we will become like Jesus Christ – everything that God had intended for Adam is fulfilled in Jesus and will be given to us in full.

So as the Apostle Paul says in Romans 8:18 brothers and sisters - *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”*

Sometimes we just get so focused on the troubles and the trials and the consequences of sin and evil and the devil in this world and we forget – we have something better coming!

Whatever good we have now is a teaser - a foretaste – so don't let this world in its current state get the better of you.

Brothers and sisters, as you celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ this Christmas season – remember the words of the Son of God when he said *“In this world you will have trouble – but take heart! I have overcome the world!!”*

So come Lord Jesus – come Soon

Brothers and sisters – it's a Red Christmas! Amen.