



JESUS WAS BORN SO THAT WE COULD BE BORN AGAIN

Part 5 of He Made Us Family: God's Work, Our Witness 2012

Pastor Mark Driscoll | December 23, 2012

[music]

Pastor Dave Bruskas: Something that many people may not realize about Mars Hill Church is Mars Hill started as a kidless church. Pastor Mark and Grace as they launched the church as a small Bible study, didn't yet have kids, and I don't believe we had a single child at Mars Hill Church until at least the church began its second, maybe even third year. But here's what's incredible today: on any given Sunday at Mars Hill Church we have almost three thousand children. Almost a megachurch of children alone that attend Mars Hill Church. Who's excited that it's almost Christmas? Alright, absolutely. Why do we celebrate Christmas? What's Christmas about?

—It's Jesus' birthday.

Pastor Dave Bruskas: It's Jesus' birthday? Good, did you have something different?

—To celebrate and have fun on his birthday.

Pastor Dave Bruskas: What's the funnest thing you do on Jesus' birthday?

—I like to open presents.

Pastor Dave Bruskas: Awesome.

—Go over to my grandma's house and we have ice cream while we're watching a movie.

Pastor Dave Bruskas: Wow. What's so special about Jesus? How is Jesus different than any other boy that's ever been born?

—He's God's Son.

Pastor Dave Bruskas: Okay, good, he's God's Son. What else?

—He doesn't sin.

Pastor Dave Bruskas: He doesn't sin, good.

—He loves us more than anything.

Pastor Dave Bruskas: Good. Alright, let me ask you guys another question: what were the names of Jesus' mom and dad? Who were they?

—Mary and Joseph.

Pastor Dave Bruskas: Okay, Mary and Joseph. Do you think Joseph and Mary ever had any problems with Jesus when he was a little boy?

—No.

Pastor Dave Bruskas: No. Who wants to sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus? Who wants to start us off? Can you start us off? Alright, you stand up. Alright, you stand up and lead us. We're all going to sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus. Okay, start us out. Ready, go.

♪ Happy birthday to you ♪ Real loud. ♪ Happy birthday to you ♪ ♪ Happy birthday dear Jesus ♪ ♪ Happy birthday to you ♪ ♪ Cha-cha-cha ♪ ♪

The biggest opportunity in the world is to be a part of God's people, God's family, his church.

If Jesus is ultimately important, then the people who love Jesus are critically important to us as well.

WHY WAS JESUS BORN?

Merry Christmas. This is our big Christmas celebration, and for those of you who are part of the Mars Hill family, we're glad to see you. For those of you who are visiting our church family, we want to welcome you, especially the kids. We're doing this service a little bit differently. The family style means that the little people will be with us in the big room. So if your kids are making noise, climbing around, running around, that's totally fine. We love them; it's good to have them.

And when families get together for the holidays it's the kids who really make Christmas, right? And at our house we've got our kids and then the cousins come over, and yes, it's going to be loud, and yes, it's going to be a mess, and yes, it's going to be noisy, and that's what makes it wonderful. So don't "shh" your kids a lot; just let 'em have a good time, and we're glad to have you with us.

And one of the things that makes Christmas so wonderful is that we get to think about and celebrate birth. And who doesn't love birth? I know every time Grace was pregnant with one of our kids I was thrilled, excited, really anticipating the great gift of the next child. Any time someone in my extended family or a church family comes up and says, "I've got good news to tell: We're pregnant," it's a celebratory joy. It's a wonderful opportunity when somebody introduces you to their newborn baby. What an amazing, epic moment and event and gift that is.

At the Christmas season we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God with us. The eternal God entered into history, the Creator God entered into creation. God who made man came down as a man, starting as a baby. And ultimately we celebrate every year this great birth of Jesus, the most important person who's ever lived in the history of the world.

More songs have been sung about him, more paintings painted of him, more books written regarding him than anyone who lived in the history of the world. Our calendar is all about Jesus: B.C., before Christ, A.D., anno Domini, "the year of our Lord," is what it means in Latin. Our entire recording of human history is around the birth of this baby, the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why we sing songs about the birth of Jesus, we send out cards with depictions of the birth of Jesus, and that's why we're here today to examine the birth of Jesus.

I know some of you are Christians and you believe that Jesus grew up and lived without sin, and died for your sin, and rose for your salvation, and ascended into heaven, and he's alive and well today. Some of you don't believe that or you at least question that or in the process of coming to believe that.

In light of that, here's the question I want to answer in what will be a short sermon for you. Maybe that's my Christmas gift: you get one short sermon a year. So here it is, we're going to answer this question: Why was Jesus born? At Christmas we celebrate that he was born, the question is, why was Jesus born? Here's the answer: Jesus was born so that we could be born again.

SO THAT WE COULD BE BORN AGAIN

Go to 1 Peter 1:3 and if you don't have a Bible it's okay, we'll put it up on the screen. Let's read it together. Here is Peter, now, for those of you who may not be familiar with the ministry of Jesus, he had disciples, students, and they followed him and they learned from him. And one of them was a man named Peter, and he ended up being the leader of the disciples. And so at this point Jesus has died, risen, returned to heaven, and this man Peter is the leader of early Christianity.

And here's what Peter writes in a book bearing his name, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" He says, "I'm really excited about something. I want to share something amazing with you. This is something to be really enthusiastic about." That whole concept of "blessed be" is a way of rejoicing, of celebrating; it's the kind of emotional response we have when a really sweet couple comes up and says, "We're engaged," or a couple comes up and says, "We're pregnant," or someone comes up and says, "Meet my newborn baby." It's a rejoicing; it's a celebrating.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy—" He's here alluding to the love of God, the kindness of God, the compassion of God, the affection of God, the Father heart of God. He just told us that God is a Father, and he has now this great insight of mercy is the Father's heart toward us.

Some of you didn't have a father. Some of you didn't have a good father and when you would do something wrong you would live in terror of your father. Will he get angry? Will he care? Will he help? Will he hurt? Well, God's a Father whose heart is filled with mercy. God's a Father who loves his kids. God's the kind of Father that in your time of need you run to him, not from him, knowing that he'll help you and not harm you.

"According to his great mercy—" What has he done for us? What has this great Father done for the family of God? "He has caused us to be born again," born again. So Jesus was born that we might be born again, "to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Let me unpack this big idea of being born again. And this comes out of John 3. While on the earth, Jesus was out preaching and teaching, and he met a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a devoutly religious man. He'd studied the Scriptures, he knew quite a bit. He'd been born into a believing household and family line. Though he had been born, he had not yet been born again. And so he encountered Jesus, and he had questions for Jesus, and Jesus said something to Nicodemus that utterly confused him. He looked at him right in the eye and he said, "You must be born again." Nicodemus was confused. "What do you mean born again?"

What he's talking about is that we are born physically and we celebrate that. That's why we have birthdays and we celebrate our birth. But in addition to being born physically we need to be born again spiritually. We need a second birth of our soul. The first birth is of our body, the second birth is of our soul.

Let me explain why this is necessary. We are born in sin. Some of you don't like to hear about sin, but let me say, it is incredibly helpful to believe in sin. It explains why the world is not the way that it should be. It explains why we are not the way we should be. It explains even why our relationships and sometimes those difficult moments during the holidays, why our families are not the way they should be. Something's gone wrong.

And the Bible tells us that it's sin. Let me explain that to you. Sin is in relation to God. The Bible says that God is holy, and God is good, and God is perfect. Sin is anything that is contrary to the will of God, the Word of God, the ways of God. To make it as simple as possible, sin is whatever God is not. Sin includes our thoughts because God knows our thoughts. Sin includes our words, sin includes our deeds, sin includes our motives, why we do and don't do the things we do and don't do. Sin includes commission; this is where you do a bad thing. Sin includes omission, where you were supposed to do a good thing and you failed to do it. All of that is what the Bible means by "sin."

And we're sinful from our mother's womb. There's a guy named David, he writes a book of the Bible called Psalms. He contributes many of these songs. In Psalm 51 he says that we are sinful from our mother's womb. Everyone is, with the exception of Jesus Christ. Everyone is, with the exception of Jesus Christ. That's why Jesus had an earthly mother but no earthly father. He did not have any inherited sin nature handed down to him; he was without sin. He was the beginning of a whole new humanity.

Now, the truth is, going back to the very beginning, we had two parents: our first parents, Adam and Eve. They were created by God, and he loved them and provided a perfect

environment for them, and they sinned against him. And as a result we inherit a sin nature from our mother's womb. This leads to a life of sin separated from God, the consequence of which is death, so we could be born physically, live sinfully, and die eternally.

God loves us so much that he chose to do something to save us from that terrible thing. His Father heart of mercy causes us to be born again, a new birth, a spiritual birth. And this is in—he says it this way: “Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” So God's a Father, we're a sinner, Jesus is the Savior. And what he's saying is this: salvation, this great gift of mercy, the means by which we are born again spiritually—because you could be physically alive but spiritually dead. You could be breathing but not connected relationally to the God of the Bible. That God has done something to take away our sin problem, and he does that through Jesus Christ.

JESUS IS OUR SAVIOR

So now we're back to the Christmas story. Why was Jesus born? Well, his name indicates the reason that he came. The name “Jesus” literally means he is our Savior, he is our Savior. And so Jesus is born, conceived in the womb of Mary. He does not have an earthly father, he does not have an inherited sin nature, he's not a biological descendant of Adam, our first father, and he is born. And that's what we celebrate at Christmas.

And then he grows in wisdom, stature, and favor with men and God, Luke tells us. And he lives a life without any sin. He preaches, he teaches, he heals people, he cares for the widow, the orphan, the outcast, the marginalized, the needy. Jesus lives the most amazing, extraordinary life in the history of the world. That's why we still have our biggest holidays regarding him. And so Christmas is about his birth, and Easter is about his death and resurrection, what Peter is speaking of here.

Jesus lives without sin, and he goes to the cross, and he dies in our place for our sins. And then he rises three days later, actually on a Sunday. That's why Christians worship on a Sunday. It's the day of Jesus' resurrection. Death is the consequence for sin, and because Jesus had no sin, death could not hold him. And since he died for our sin, his resurrection is our victory. That's what Peter is saying.

Here's my question to you: Have you been born again? You say, “I don't know.” Have you turned from sin and trusted in Jesus? See, what I don't want you to do is simply appreciate the life of Jesus; I want you to experience the life of Jesus. Anyone can appreciate the life of Jesus, loving, gracious, merciful, kind, generous, very nice to women, children, those in need. Anyone can admire the life of Jesus, but only someone who's been born again can experience the life of Jesus, the resurrected life of Jesus Christ coming into your life.

That's what it means to be born again. It means to be born again in Jesus Christ. That takes two things: repentance and faith. Repentance is where we see ourselves as a sinner in need of a Savior, and faith is where we trust in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Again, back to Peter. “He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

EVERYTHING CHANGES

Now, let me say what happens to you when you become born again: Everything changes. For some it changes a little bit at a time, for some it changes a lot at a time, but you begin to change. Just like when someone is born physically, their environment changes, their activities change, they begin to grow and change outside of the womb. The analogy is similar. When you're born again spiritually you start to grow, and you change, and the life of Jesus starts working through you and taking over your life. That means you'll never be the same, and for the rest of your life you'll grow to be more and more and more like Jesus, if you've been born again.

A couple of things that this includes, number one: a new Lord. All of a sudden, if you're born again and if you have been born again, the most important person in your life is not you; it's Jesus. The highest authority in your life is not you; it's Jesus. The greatest goal of your life is not your will, but his will be done. A new Lord.

Number two: if you've been born again you become a new person. The Bible talks about Christians becoming new creations. You're a new person. You get a fresh, clean start and total forgiveness. This is why sometimes in the Bible people who become Christians, they get a new name, that's how new they are. So Abram becomes Abraham, and Cephas becomes Peter, and Saul becomes Paul, and people get new names. Why? They're just a radically new person. Here's the big idea: You can't meet Jesus and not change. Some of you may say, “Oh, but I'm a Christian but I've not changed.” You may not be a Christian. You may have been born into a Christian family, but you have not yet been born again into the family of God.

Number three: You get a new identity. You no longer identify yourself by what you've done, or what others have done to you, what successes, failures, achievements you have throughout the course of your life. Now your identity is in Christ. “He loved me, he forgives me, he saves me, he'll never leave me, he'll never forsake me. Whatever I go through is an opportunity to become more like him.” It changes our entire understanding of who we are, where we come from, why we're here, and where we're going.

To be born again includes, number four, a new power. What happens with sin is that it becomes very powerful, and in the face of it we feel very powerless. This is why around New Year's there's a flood of new books, “New Year, New You,” that's what all the marketing slogans say. Everybody gets a gym membership and is totally committed to the treadmill for three consecutive days and then it's over. And the talk shows and the social media is all about your resolutions. What are you going to do this year to make a change in your life? Here's the truth: Apart from God's power, we cannot live a new life. We may be able to make some changes, but we're ultimately not changed.

And some of you have besetting sins. What that means is you've tried, and you can't stop. Maybe the pattern is every day or every week or every month or every quarter or every year, but you're stuck. You may try to excuse it, blame someone else for it, manage it, control it, deny it, hide it. In Christ you can be rid of it because there's a new power if you're born again.

It's not your power living a life for God; it's God's power living a new life in you. That Jesus will send the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, the same power that allowed him to live a sinless life and to live in victory over temptation, he will send through the new birth the Holy Spirit to live in you. Now there's a new power. You don't have to do what you used to do. You can act differently. And it's not by your power. What we're not talking about here is more self-discipline, more self-condemnation, more self-motivation; we're talking about the life of Jesus in you, and all of a sudden, you're a different person, and you're able to live a different and new life.

Number five: This includes a new mind. You start to think differently. Things you used to be ashamed of, you're now proud of. Things that you used to be proud of, you're now

ashamed of. The way you used to see God and the world and yourself has changed and all of a sudden you see God as good, and yourself as sinful, and the world is in need of him. Your mind changes. How you view your identity, your relationships, your finances, your work, your family, your spouse, your kids, your whole mindset changes. How many of you have experienced this? The longer you live the new life in Christ—someone who's been born again, you're thinking through the renewing of your mind and the Word of God, it just keeps changing.

Number six: You get a new community. The church then becomes a family. God is the Father, Jesus is the saving big brother. That means that the church becomes a new family. That ladies are like sisters, and men are like brothers, and leaders are like big brothers and big sisters. In this whole series, He Made Us Family, it's really about that, and some people, quite frankly, during the holidays it becomes very difficult because they don't have a good, godly family, a supportive, loving, nurturing, caring, committed family. Well, church is family too, and some do have a supportive, loving family. And they're doubly blessed with their family of birth, and their family of new birth.

One of the great joys of mine every Christmas is that God has saved my whole family, my two sisters, my two brothers, my mom, and my dad. And so my family of birth has been born again. And when we get together they're my family of birth and new birth. What holds us together is not just that we're blood relatives, but the blood of Jesus Christ in our place for our sins. You get a new community. For those of you that have godly family, you're doubly blessed; you get to be part of the church. For those of you who don't have godly family, you're not abandoned; you still have the church family. It's your new community.

And number seven: You get new desires. And if you're not a Christian you may be shocked by this, but what happens when you're born again is you get new desires. You want to do things you never wanted to do and you don't want to do things that you always used to want to do. I was born again at the age of nineteen in college, and suddenly my desires, my appetites, my longings started changing.

I can still remember on a weekend in college, my friends were going out to do stuff, I don't remember what it was, and they said, "Are you going?" I said, "No." They said, "Why?" I said, "I'm going to read the Bible all day." I never had that thought in my whole life. They said, "What?" I remember one guy, he said something to the effect of, "You don't have to." And I said something to the effect of, "I know, but I want to."

See, Peter uses an analogy elsewhere. He said, "When babies are born they crave milk. They're hungry. They want to eat." When you're born again spiritually you're hungry for the Word of God. It's the nourishment that sustains your soul. All of a sudden, you start to get new desires. It's like, "I want to read the Bible. I want to learn how to pray. I want to serve other people. I want to get to know Christians. I want to look at my possessions and my time. And I want to look at my life and figure out how to steward that, to manage that in a way that is most effective for God's glory and others' good and my joy." New desires.

Let me ask you, those of you who've been born again, what new desires has God given you? You don't want to do what you used to do, you want to be more like Jesus, not because you have to but because you want to. Paul has a great line in the New Testament. He says that sin fights to keep us from doing "what we want to do." Oh, those are new desires. He's saying that Satan and sin are always trying to get us to not do what we really want to do.

Let me say this, if you are not a Christian your deepest desire is for sin. If you are a Christian and you've been born again in Jesus Christ, your deepest desire is for the will of God. So for those of you who are Christians, let me give you a secret, live a very passionate, devoted, committed life and don't settle for lesser desires, they tend to be sinful. Strive for the deeper desires, the deepest desire of your heart because if you're born again, your deepest, strongest desires are God's desires placed in you through Jesus.

THE GREAT GIFT EXCHANGE

In closing, this is the season of gift-giving and gift exchanges. You probably had one at work, or with your family, or Community Group, or friends, or you will in the next few days. Christianity is about a gift exchange. Martin Luther, the great Protestant Reformer and Bible teacher, he called it, "the great exchange." Here's the great gift exchange. Here's what I want you to give Jesus, I want you to give Jesus something for Christmas. Probably not what you were thinking you would give him; give him your sin. He doesn't need anything. He's Creator God, right now ruling and reigning over all.

Here's what he wants for Christmas: what Jesus wants for Christmas is your sin. That's why, again, Peter says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy." Peter's saying, "This is unbelievable." In mercy, God wants our sin. Now, none of you would ask for that for Christmas, right? None of us on our Christmas list said, "I would like sin and I would like to be sinned against. That's what I would like." That's what Jesus put on his Christmas list. "Give me your sin."

And then he's got a gift for you: born again, born again. He wants to give you himself as your new Lord. He wants you to be a new person with a new identity living by a new power with a new mind as part of our church family, a new community, with new desires. This is the great exchange. Jesus invites you to give him your sin and to receive from him his resurrection life in you so that you can be born again.

And so, what we're doing today is we're celebrating Jesus and we're inviting you, not just to appreciate him, but to experience him. What this means, as well, is that we will today do two things that are important. We'll have baby dedications, where we celebrate the birth of a child, and we'll have baptisms, where we celebrate the fact that people have been born again in Jesus Christ. And in baptism people are showing that they have been born again, that Jesus lived without sin, and died, and was buried, and rose, and that when Christ died, they died, and when Christ rose, they rose. And just like water cleanses us from dirt and filth, so Jesus cleanses us from sin and death.

And so we're going to invite you to give Jesus your sin, and be born again and be baptized as a demonstration of the mercy of God the Father. And some of you would say, "I did not come prepared to be baptized." God did not tell you in advance because he knew you would not show up, so he waited until right now to spring it on you. If you've never given your life to Jesus we want you to do so now. And if you have never been baptized as a Christian in obedience to Jesus we want you to do so now.

And so we will have towels, shirts, and shorts. You can change, we got it all set up, because we want to baptize you. And there could not be a better time to give your sin to Jesus, to receive the gift of being born again from Jesus, and to demonstrate it publicly through baptism, than during the Christmas season, where Jesus gives the gift that is greatest of all and we receive it with great gladness: the gift of being born again.

Father God, I thank you for this Christmas season. I thank you that you sent your only Son to come into human history as the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, we celebrate your birth in the

womb and through the womb of Mary. We celebrate the fact that you died and rose that we might be born again. For those of us who've been born again spiritually, this is a great day for us because we get to celebrate and enjoy you, Lord Jesus. And for those that are here, Lord God, maybe family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, I pray that right now, Holy Spirit, you would cause them, through the Word of God, to be born again, in Jesus' name, amen.

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.
