

The Baby's been born. Now what?!
January 5, 2020

Today is the first Sunday of a new month.
Today is the first Sunday of a new month in a new year.
And, today is the first Sunday of a new month in a new year in a new decade!

It is a great time to take stock of our lives. It's a great time to leave behind the past with its pain, disappointments and hurt. It's a great time to look forward to what marvelous things God has in store for us this day, this month, this year, and this decade! We know we can trust in Him. In fact, we grow in learning to trust in Him with all our hearts, and lean not on our own understanding. But in all our ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct our paths! (Proverbs 3:5,6)

We know He works all things together for us who love Him and are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

This is a great time for cleansing, healing, and hope.

So, "the baby's been born! Now what?!"

This is in reference, of course, to the birth of Christ we just celebrated. In case anyone missed it, we call Jesus' birthday Christmas! We give gifts to one another because God gave His great gift of Jesus Christ to us!

So what? Does this really make any difference in our lives?

I'm hoping today by the end of this message, it will.

When a baby is born, there is hope. This new life might bring something new and special into the world. This was certainly true of the birth of Jesus Christ, our Messiah. He was, and is, "Emmanuel," God with us.

He was and is, our Savior. He saves us from our sins and death and reconnects us to our Creator and gives us life forever even after we die!

Amanda did a beautiful job of bringing us the Word last week. She skillfully tied in unwrapping the gift of salvation with how we live, today, in this world.

This first Sunday in a new month in a new year in a new decade, let's take time to evaluate this.

How are we doing at living out our church's vision statement: "Fully devoted followers of Christ impacting communities for God?"

We can ask ourselves right now, "Am I fully devoted?" If not, in what areas do I need to change?

Am I/Are we impacting communities for God? This school? The Benton House? Our neighborhoods? Port Orange? New Smyrna Beach? And beyond? If not, let's ask God to help us connect with just one person this week in a helpful, need-meeting, Christ's-love-sharing kind of way!

Just as a baby represents new life, the minute we chose to believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and God raised Him from the dead; the moment we decided we wanted to begin a relationship with Him, it was the birth of our salvation.

But it cannot stop there. Just as a new, healthy baby will grow, so must our relationship and experience with God. We wouldn't want a baby not to grow. So it is with our faith. God doesn't want us to just choose to believe, He wants us to grow in our relationship with Him, and others.

Did you ever realize God's "eternal purpose is to bring Heaven and earth together?" (Ephesians 3:9-13) No wonder Jesus put that line in what is known as the Lord's Prayer: "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done." (Matthew 6:10)

Can you imagine how different this world would be if everyone belonged to the Kingdom of God, and lived by His ways, with His power?

Amanda reminded us we are to "offer ourselves as instruments of righteousness." Which instrument in the orchestra will you be today?

And what about that righteousness? We get that from Christ. But even when we believe and walk in relationship with Him, sin still creeps in and we need regular tuneups and checkups and tuning up and cleanings too!

Again, today is a great day for that. We can ask ourselves, silently, Lord, where have I gotten off track? Tune me up, please. Give me that cleaning, even if it's a bit uncomfortable. My teeth, my life will be so shiny afterwards it will be well worth it!

A fictional character named Mother Hildegarde said, "God bids us to revel in mercy, tread sins underfoot, and hurl iniquities into the sea!"

God told the people of Israel the same when he had Isaiah tell them: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength." (30:15)

We were taught last week that we get to participate in God's purpose. And part of this involves protecting unity in the church. Remember, as members of a body of Christ, we are participants in the great drama unfolding, of God bringing heaven and earth together! Our lives have a greater purpose.

We must work hard to encourage one another, and not be negative and discouraging, instead. Never let anyone outside the church speak negatively or critically of a brother or sister in this body. How refreshing to know that if it ever happens, we will defend one another. We have each others' backs.

An orchestra which produces beautiful music is one in which there is perfect unity and harmony and everyone plays their part in participating in God's purpose.

To help us in doing this, there were "five s's" given last week. They are:

1) be on the Same page. The importance of total, fierce, unity can never be stressed enough. God works miracles and does powerful things through people who are unified! Continuing to read God's word, the Bible, on a daily or several-times-a-week-basis is an important part of this too. When we know who He is and how He works, we all carry out the same orders, just in different ways.

2) Single-mindedness. We all need to be following the same vision. You heard it earlier. What is our vision?:” **“Fully devoted followers of Christ impacting communities for God.”** This should be each one of our’s top priority!

Today is a good day to ask ourselves, how can I be more fully devoted?
What is one thing I can do to impact this, or another, community? *Also, PRAYING FOR AUSTRALIA! Tithing 10%, or more, from gross income to support the work and ministries of the church. (Don’t forget any cash gifts you may have received too. Oops!)*

3) Speak life. Yes. Life. The Bible says we either bless or curse with our mouths. Please, speak life, not death. Please, be positive, not negative. Please, be affirming and encouraging, not tearing down, and discouraging.

Again, this is a great day to leave those changes at the altar if we realize we’ve been doing one, rather than the other. We have such a gracious God who is always ready to forgive and forget and build up and equip!

4) The fourth one was to Serve others. We have various opportunities for doing this in our church: If you sing or play an instrument, talk to Troy about serving on the Praise Team. If you like kids or youth talk to Dan about serving in Children or Youth ministry. Come and serve in prayer the first Friday from 5p-12m at the church office. Come on other Fridays and help transform the cafetorium into a sanctuary. Let Bob know if you’d like to help serve Holy Communion. That is a privilege.

Let Linda or Shirley know if you can help love on the folks at the Benton House Assisted Living Facility the first and third Tuesdays.

Let them also know if you would like to help serve the homeless and those in need the fourth Friday of each month. That always helps get our perspectives straight.

And coming this month... a new gardening group! If you like to garden, let Sharon Moore know you’d like to help as this group follows up on tending to the 65 plants and flowers we put in the school’s courtyard in November.

5) The Sacraments was the last “S” from last week. We’ll have the privilege today of not only receiving the elements of bread and juice which stand for the love of God, but also putting our hands in water, first, to remember our baptisms. As we do this, let it be a symbolic act of cleansing, too.

Lauren Daigle sings a song called “How Can it Be?” She begins by singing, “I am guilty, Ashamed of what I’ve done, what I’ve become. These hands are dirty, I dare not lift them up to the Holy one.” “You plead my cause, You right my wrongs, You break my chains, You overcome. You gave Your life, To give me mine. You say that I am free. How can it be?”

I am here to tell you right now that there’s nothing any of us has done that God cannot forgive. Put your hands in the water, and remember who you are.

In the movie Lion King, the wise old baboon, “Rafiki,” asks Simba, the young lion if he remembers who he is, at one point. Rafiki says, “I know who you are, do you know who you are?”

Let's remember who we are, and whose we are.

Last week we sang, "I Am a Child of God." Yes that is who we are, and whose we are. That should give us great esteem.

The baby's born. Now what?

Most first-time parents experience the helpless feeling of not knowing what to do when they get that newborn baby home. The first time it cries non-stop, or does what Jon and I fondly called "projectile vomiting." The new parents feel panicky and need some help and support.

I want to suggest to you that we also need help and support.

This morning we get to go straight to the book of Ephesians for that very thing! Let's read Ephesians 1:15-19a.

In around the year A.D. 62, about 29 yrs after Christ was crucified, buried, and rose from the dead, His passionate follower Paul was in prison in Rome. He was waiting on a hearing with Nero, who was the Caesar at the time. Nero was said to be half-crazy, and set Rome on fire and blamed the Christians for it. But that's another story for another time.

Meanwhile, Paul wrote some of the most important letters, or books, of the Bible, from prison, in Rome.

He had four people deliver four letters to four churches in the area we now call Turkey. The letter to the Ephesians, a church Paul dearly loved, was given to "Tychicus" from Ephesus. (Ephesians 6:21) Paul wrote to the Ephesians to strengthen their Christian faith, by explaining the nature and purpose of the church, which is the body of Christ.

The baby's born. Now what?

Now, let's live like the body of Christ we're called to be.

Paul tells them he gives thanks for them. He prays for them. And he's even asking God for wisdom and revelation for them to know God better.

How do we get to know someone better?

We spend time with that person. There is no shortcut.

The same is true with God.

There is no substitute for knowing God personally.

Do we really know God, or just know about God? Perhaps we can decide to make an effort to spend more time alone with God this new month, new year, new decade.

Paul writes one of the most beautiful sentences in the human language, (don't forget he was an educated, Jewish lawyer, after all) in Ephesians 1:18: He says he prays for these people he loves, this church, and that "the eyes of their hearts will be enlightened!"

The original Greek language uses those same poetic words.

Have you ever imagined your heart having eyes?

The phrase is a provocative one. What does enlightened eyes in hearts look like? The answer is found in the definition of the word enlightened.

And this ties in with everything else.

To “enlighten” is to shine, or to give light.

As God’s people, as the body of Christ, we are to be individuals whose hearts shine and bring light to others.

Jesus is, after all, the Light of the world.

But there’s more.

Paul writes that he prays for enlightened heart eyes for these close friends for a purpose! “In order that...” you may know the hope to which he has called you!

In other words, if we can just grasp the significance of the beauty and power we have available to us through God’s Holy Spirit there’s no stopping us!

Right after the hope, Paul ties in the next phrase with a comma and it is “the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people!

We have an inheritance, people!

At the beginning of this chapter, Paul wrote of how we are “blessed in the Heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” (1:3)

This means that, in Christ, we have all the benefits of knowing God - we’re chosen for saving, we’re accepted as His very own children, we get forgiveness, we get insight, the gifts of the Spirit, the power to do God’s will, and the hope of living forever with Christ!

We have a glorious inheritance as His people!

But that’s not all!

We also get “incomparably great power for us who believe.”

The world fears the power of the atom, but we belong to the God of the universe who not only created that atomic power, but also raised Jesus Christ from the dead!

God’s incomparably great power is available for all of us who believe!
Nothing is impossible with God! (Luke 1:47)

So the baby’s been born. Now what?

May I suggest now we get to know the baby - Jesus Christ.

May I suggest we get to know God better, and pray to Him for, and then follow, His wisdom.

Solomon said to his son, in Proverbs 24:13, to eat honey. He said it’s good. Then he tied in God’s wisdom. He said, like “wisdom is like honey for you.”

Honey is not only sweet, and good, it can also be life-saving.

Wisdom is not only good, and sweet, it results in a life of peace and hope.

What wisdom do we need to consume today? And how can we share it with others?

As we begin this new month, year and decade on the right path, lets commit to get to know God better.

Let's learn to wait on God, and surrender to Him completely.

Let's quit always trying to do it our way, and miss huge opportunities to share life with God, and with others.

Today is also known as "Ephiphany Sunday" in traditional churches. It's the Sunday the visit of the Magi is celebrated.

If you recall the story, they came from a long way away simply to worship the King.

The baby's born. Now what?

Now, worship.

Let's make worship, and getting to know Christ, and sharing His love and His light our top priority.

Let's STAY in God's Word and be on the SAME page.

Let's live a strong and vibrant, impassioned faith life with shared SINGLE-MINDEDNESS.

Let's SPEAK life, and not death. Let's search ourselves for, and get rid of, today, the tendency to go to the negative. (Illustration of preaching to 100... 99 positives.. dwell on the one negative...)

Let's SERVE others, and connect to the spiritual, with the SACRAMENTS. We'll go now to that very act...