The same tendency applies to Christmas, too. Ostensibly, Christmas is about celebrating the birth of a baby, but we are now so scripted and overzealous with our decorations and our traditions that we miss the real meaning of the event. Too many people nowadays, have only the vaguest notion that Christmas has to do with a birth. We seem much more interested in clogging malls, buying presents, and putting elves on shelves than pondering the true reason for the season. Christmas started out as a simple celebration around the fourth century, but in the 21st century it is a viral, global phenomenon which burns an explosive swath of consumerism through our culture. Somewhere amid all the tinsel and trimmings, we forgot that Christmas is really about the most important reveal in history.

When we read the story of Jesus’ birth in Luke’s gospel, it may be so familiar to us that we miss the fact that the story was an astonishing revelation. When God revealed the arrival of his Son, it is not at an over-the-top party. God’s reveal takes place in some very quiet ways: through the ancient words of prophets; with an angel’s whispers to a young girl from Nazareth; to shepherds working long into the night and sleeping in the fields; and to scholars from afar who noticed a new, silent star in the heavens. God does not seem at all interested in making the arrival of Jesus a media event.

Luke clearly sets this up as a contrast between Jesus and Caesar, whom he mentions at the beginning of Chapter 2. Everything Caesar Augustus cause a media frenzy, the media in those days being coins and heralds. Augustus minted coins proclaiming that he was a “son of god” (in his case, being the adopted son of Julius Caesar, whom Augustus and others considered to be divine in some sense). Heralds announced Caesar as “Lord” and “Prince of Peace.” By contrast, Luke makes it clear that Jesus is the rightful Son of God, the world’s only Lord, and the true bringer of peace. But the announcement does not take place in the halls of government or in the first-century equivalent of social media. The announcement appears in nowhere places to people who are nobodies.

Furthermore, the announcement is more than simply, “It’s a boy!” The birth of Jesus is a declaration about God’s purpose. The angel tells Mary that Jesus will be the holy “Son of God” (Luke 1:36). Angels tell the shepherds that Jesus will be their “Savior,” the One who is “the Messiah, the Lord,” the world’s true king (2:12). In Rome, the army would sing their allegiance to Caesar, but in a field outside Bethlehem God’s angel armies declare God’s praise: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom [God] favors” (v. 14).

This birth announces that God is breaking into a broken world, not in a heavenly display of pyrotechnics, but in the form of a tiny, hungry, leaky, burpy, human child. And this baby, fully human and fully divine, born of God’s Holy Spirit and of the virgin Mary, will forever redefine humanity. Indeed, the real announcement of Christmas is that, in the coming of Jesus, God reboots the human race.

Paul’s letter to Titus broadcasts in powerful terms what is truly revealed by this birth. The “grace of God” appeared in Jesus, and that grace spread like wildfire, offering God’s salvation to all people (Titus 2:11). In Jesus, God fully identified with a humanity broken by sin and offered us new life, new birth, made possible in Jesus’ victory over sin by his death and resurrection from the dead. Jesus is the perfect model of humanity, the One who is “truly human” as the Nicene Creed says, who came down from heaven “for us and for our salvation.”

As the new model for humanity, Jesus enables us in the power of the Holy Spirit to say “no” to the ways of a broken world, and “yes” to God’s vision for a world restored. Jesus guides us “to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly” while we wait for another reveal to come: the “blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). The gift that Jesus brings through his birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension is a self-giving love that can “redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:14).

The true reveal of Christmas is twofold: Jesus is revealed as the world’s true Savior and Lord, and it is also revealed that we can be reborn to live into the purpose and vocation for which God created us. As John puts it, when we receive Christ and believe in his name, we are given “power to become children of God, who were born not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13). Jesus would tell Nicodemus that becoming a child of God requires being “born from above” and “born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:3, 5).

Such good news cannot be contained in a cake or blown up with fireworks, it can only be revealed in Jesus. This great, good news means that it does not matter where you came from, where you were born, or what the circumstances were; it does not matter what your past looks like, what sins you committed, what hurts and brokenness you have in your life. The great, good news is that Jesus comes to offer you a new birth, a new beginning. His grace makes it possible for you to be forgiven and your life to be transformed! All you need do is receive him and let his grace and love catch fire in your life.

At Christmas, the Savior of the world is revealed and laid in a manger. The prophets quietly revealed his coming, his humanity, and his purpose centuries before. Isaiah celebrated him as a child “born for us, a son given to us” who is the “Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father” and the true “Prince of Peace” who establishes the reign of God’s kingdom (Isaiah 9:6-7). That Savior continues to reveal how we, too, may be people renewed by God’s sacrificial and forgiving love. That is something worth celebrating! No explosives required.

**Source:** Beck, Julie. “How Many People Have to Die Before We’re Done with Gender Reveals?” The Atlantic. November 11, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2019/11/gender-reveal-disasters/601801/>. Retrieved November 12, 2019.

**The Savior Reveal**

Sunday, December 20, 2020 Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Having a baby is cause for great celebration! In the days before ultrasound testing, the birth of a child carried with it an element of surprise. Would the baby be a boy or a girl? These days, however, most people do not wait until the child is born to announce whether it is a him or her. “Gender reveal” parties are all the rage: people gather family and friends (and social media followers) at a party to disclose what little bundle of joy they are expecting.

There is a consensus that this trend began with a simple post on social media in 2008. Jenna Karvunidis and her husband cut into a cake revealing pink icing for a girl. She posted it on her blog, and the idea went viral. Regrettably, since social media makes everything a competition to go a step further, some gender reveal parties go way off the rails.

Take the case of a gender reveal party in which the family paid for a plane to crop dust a field with 350 gallons of pink water to honor their unborn female child. The plane stalled out and crashed after dumping its shower of pink. In another incident, a father-to-be started a 47,000-acre wildfire that caused $8.2 million in damage when he shot his hunting rifle at an explosive target full of blue powder. No one was killed in either of these incidents, thankfully, but that was not the case in October 2019, when an Iowa woman died when a pyrotechnic gender reveal inadvertently turned into a pipe bomb.

We now tend to over-script and over-celebrate things to impress strangers. It is hard to imagine our great-grandparents taking pictures of their lunch and sharing those snaps with their friends. Whatever the impulse, gender reveal disasters can overshadow the joy of the actual birth of the baby.