

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
December 2, 2018

Love that Gave Up the Son
Luke 2:1-7

2:1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

2:2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria.

2:3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town.

2:4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David,

2:5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

2:6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.

2:7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

1. Grieving Love

A Bible study, which had before Christmas, one person said: “I had something very sad when Christmas was coming. Jesus will eventually die on the cross. Jesus was born to be suffered and to die. At that time I gave birth and raising my child, I thought how mother Mary felt holding her baby while she was thinking of the future of him.”

This person spoke of Simeon's word to Mary. There is this in the Bible. “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many

in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed and a sword will pierce through your own soul also” (Luke 2:34-35) Simeon prophesied the sufferings of the Lord Jesus and her mother, Maty. That would have been a bad word for the newborn baby.

After the birth of Jesus and after the wise men of the east came to worship Jesus, King Herod sent troops to Bethlehem to kill boys aged two years or younger to make Jesus dead. Baby Jesus and his mother were defended by Joseph and escaped from this massacre in a crisis, but the lives of many babies were robbed. This is also a sad story about Christmas. Although the Savior came into the world, the world rejected and shut out the Savior.

Today’s Gospel reading tells about when Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem, but here also it says that the Savior was shut out and kept away. The last word of this paragraph of Luke 2:7 says, “... because there was no place for them in the inn.”

The British royal family uses St. Mary’s hospital in Westminster when giving birth, it is probably the best production room completed with all facilities and staff. In ancient times, medicine did not develop as much as modern, but still the best place and things were prepared for the birth of the prince and princess. But there was neither a clean production house nor a bastion, nor a midwife in the birth of the Son of God, the King of the kings, the Lord of the Lord, and the Savior. As it was, the Son of God was born in a smelly and dark livestock hut. From the time of birth, the Lord Jesus became alienated and was not treated even by humans.

“Because there was no place for them in the inn.” This is very sad word. John paraphrased this word as “He was in the world, and the

world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” (John 1:10-11) The “world” in the Bible means the human society that shuts out God and goes against God. Despite the fact that religious things have become considerably thin, yet people still respect the teachings of their religions and are looking for something “spiritual.” They are accepting various teachings and psychics but, never accepting the true Savior who the true God sent for us. There is no “room” to welcome the Lord in the person’s heart, life, and living, even if they sing “The Lord is coming” at Christmas, even though Hymns are flowing and Biblical words such as Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love are decorated. People who love God become sad when they see a “Christmas” without Christ.

2. Giving Love

I think that mother Mary’s sorrow was not because of her anxiety about her child’s future, but was sacred sorrow for the suffering of the Son of God. I also think that Mary’s suffering with Jesus was deeper than any other disciples. But that sorrow turned into joy in the morning of the Resurrection. At the Cross, Jesus’ disciples felt their helplessness completely. However, at the time of Pentecost, that helplessness was turned into a great power. In the Bible, there is sorrow in joy and joy in sorrow. Moreover, there is weakness in power and power in weakness. It seems contradicted at first sight, but there is truth in what looks like this “contradiction.” It is the same for the “love of God” that the Bible speaks.

Speaking of the love of God, the most representative scripture of

the love of God is John 3:16; “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” In this verse, there is contradiction, that is “God loved the world.”

“The world” is the system of human society that excludes God and rebels against God. It is us that drove the Savior to the barn. The Bible tells the believer not to love the world or the things in the world. 1 John 2: 15 says. “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” James 4:4 also says, “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” These words sound like very strict, but they are not extreme. This is the standard of the Bible. The Bible never compromises this standard. And God, who separated believers from the world for Himself, desires them not to be conformed to this world, but be transformed to “the image of God” or “Christ-likeness.” (Romans 12:2).

But John 3:16 says “God loved the world.” God loves the world that He told believers not to love. God loved the people who were conformed to the world and became a part of the world. And He gave His one and only Son in order to carry out the love and save them from the world. The word “giving” also means “gifting,” “giving up,” “dedicating,” and so on. In the case that “God gave His only begotten Son,” it includes the meaning of “giving up,” “abandoning,” and “forsaking.” Speaking in English, it is not simply “give” but “give up.” When Jesus declared the communion, he gave the disciples

bread and said, “This is my body, which is given for you.” In another transition, it is “This is my Body, which will be given up for you.” “Give up,” that means that you do not claim anything for yourself and give everything. God loved the world so much so He gave up His one and only Son. And Christ, the Son, also gave up knowing His Father’s love and plan.

When I think about Jesus was born in Bethlehem and was laid down in a manger, it always reminds me of the communion. The name “Bethlehem” has the meaning of “house of bread.” It was the feeding box of the livestock that Jesus was put to sleep. Jesus was placed like food for the livestock in a manger in the town of Bethlehem. In fact, Jesus has become food that gives life to those who believe. God the Father made a decision to let the beloved Son die for the salvation of the people and it was done. Jesus, His Son also gave Himself to people. The decision of God’s love, the sacrifice of his Son will not lose the power of salvation, no matter how dark the times will be. The darker the times become, the brighter God’s love shines. And the radiance of His love becomes greater, and it will be the salvation and joy of the believers.

3. Determining Love

To show God’s love, a short movie, titled “Bridge,” was made in Prague, Czech in 2003. There were a father and a son. Father was a railroad worker and operated a movable bridge. When a ship comes, he lifts the bridge and when a train comes, he put down the bridge. When the bridge is up, of course, a train have to waits at the signal. But one train ignored the signal and sped up to the bridge. When his eight year

old son saw this and tried to tell his father, he fell into the machine accidentally. If father put down the bridge, his son would die caught in the machine. But if he does not put down the bridge, many passengers would die. What should father do and what he did?

The father put down the bridge. He saved many passengers making a sacrifice of his son. The God also put down a bridge. God saves the world by making his Son the sacrifice for our sins. Jesus Christ became literally “the bridge” between God and people in order that people can come back to God. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” God made his decision that he gave his Son because of his love. Let us answer his decision of love through our decision of faith. What kind of decision should we make? It should be the decision of trusting the Savior Jesus and obeying the Lord Jesus. And, let have the greatest joy we ever experienced by the decision of faith.

(Prayer)

Dear God, our Father, we praise your great, deep, precious, and unchanging love. You had sorrow, grief, pain, and made the serious decision to give us your love. We also have sorrow, grief, pain because of our disqualification to your love. But by the decision of faith we receive your grace and mercy, and rest in your love. Lord, invite us to the holy sorrow and holy joy, today. Lead us to spend this precious day by faith. We pray this in the name of your Son Jesus, Amen.