

Baptism of Our Lord—A
Isaiah 42:1-7

What will the Baby Jesus Grow Up to Be?

“Ah, look at the cute, little baby! How old is he? Is he a good baby? He has eyes just like his father.” People are full of praise and positive comments when they see a new baby. There’s a lot of oohing and ahing and all kinds of polite, little questions. Babies just seem to have this ability to attract attention because of their innocent looks and helpless appearance. But in the hearts of those who really know and love the child, there are much more serious questions that go beyond that baby’s cuteness in the cradle. What is this child going to be when he or she grows up? Is he or she going to be devoted to God or to the devil? Will he or she be selfish or dedicated to his or her family and fellow-man? Will he or she work hard and provide for others, or will he be dependent on drugs and alcohol and a drain on society? What will the baby be like?

Because you and I have just seen the little baby Jesus, that’s a pretty important question for us too—especially since this little baby is the most important baby ever to arrive in this world. The celebration of Jesus’ birthday is over. The hangers-on of the church have paid their respects to the cute, little baby Jesus. They have come to the Christmas services. They have gone “ooh” and “ahh.” They have fellowshiped with others who like to sing the cradle songs and sweet lullabies. But most of these people don’t care what the baby grows up to be. But those who are really concerned about the baby Jesus are back in church this new year and they are asking the important questions: “What will this baby grow up to be? Will he serve God or the, devil? Will he lead us to heaven or to hell? Will he live up to all those mighty promises made about him in the Old Testament? What will this baby be like?”

Those are the kind of questions you and I should be asking at the beginning of this new year. We who have heard the stories of his birth know he is a special child. The angels announced him. The shepherds worshipped him. The wise men came from far away to kneel down before him. What will the baby Jesus grow up to be? Our Old Testament lesson is God the Father’s answer to that question. Through the prophet Isaiah, God the Father says that when the baby grows up he will be: The strength of the weak, the savior of the lost, and the glory of the Lord.

I. The strength of the weak

One of the most unusual things about Jesus’ birth was its humble surroundings. Yet when you stop and think about it, isn’t that one of the most compelling things about this little baby? The stable and the manger, the swaddling clothes, the lowly shepherds, the darkness of the night... why these are the very things that make the baby Jesus someone we are attracted to. Already at his birth Jesus showed us something about his adult life—that life would be a humble one. Although he is the King of all kings, he did not bring mighty armies from heaven. Although he is The Prophet, he didn’t build crystal cathedrals to impress the upper class. Although he is The Great High Priest, he doesn’t sacrifice another’s life. He gave up his own. Our text says: “*Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight... He will not cry out. He will not raise his voice in the street*” (1-2). God the Father is talking here about a Jesus who made himself the humblest of all servants so that weak people would not be afraid to come to him. He waited his turn to speak in the Nazareth

synagogue just like everybody else. He taught Mary and Martha in their home. He preached to multitudes on hillsides and from fishing boats. He sat down and talked with a Samaritan woman at the side of a well. He instructed the twelve in the privacy of the upper room. He comforted the men from Emmaus by walking along with them on the road.

What will the baby grow up to be? Why, this lowly servant will be the strength of the weak. Listen to the beautiful words of our text that describe Jesus Christ: *“A bent reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not snuff out”* (3). Here is someone who is always tender and gentle in the treatment of his weak and feeble followers. *“A bent reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not snuff out”* (3). Here is someone who is never ashamed to call himself our brother. A reed is a hollow blade of grass. Once such a reed is bent over, it is impossible to ever get it to stand by itself again. Isaiah prophesies that Jesus Christ will not snap off such a bruised reed. Jesus will not be so hard on a troubled sinner that that sinner will throw in the towel in despair. Jesus will patiently encourage such a sinner and help him along and fix what is almost broken in that sinner’s life. *“A dimly burning wick he will not snuff out”* (3). That’s a picture of what sometimes happens to Christian faith. Sometimes it is very weak, not hot and burning brightly, but barely flickering. Jesus seeks to strengthen such weak faith, not snuff it out. Think of how Jesus did that for his own weak disciples: a back-sliding Peter, and a doubting Thomas. Think of how Jesus did that for all of those so-called undesirables about whom the Pharisees mumbled behind our Lord’s back: *“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them”* (Luke 15:2). Think of how Jesus did that for that troubled fellow who fell on his knees and begged: *“Lord I believe, help me overcome my unbelief”* (Mark 9:24).

What will the baby grow up to be? This baby came to be the strength of all of us weak and frail human beings. Isn’t that something so wonderful to know for this new year? Once again this year you and I are going to have plenty of moments of sinful weakness. Moments when we give up the fight against Satan and give into his temptations, but our Jesus doesn’t give up on us. Moments when we turn our backs on him, but our Jesus won’t ever turn away from us. Moments when we let go of him, but our Jesus isn’t going to let go of us. Oh, so patiently, oh, so gently, oh, so tenderly, Jesus sticks with us and nurtures us through this life. *“A bent reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not snuff out”* (3). How many days have there been when our life, with all its ups and downs and all its different troubles and problems, felt just like one of those bruised reeds? But then our Jesus came to us as only he can, here in his Word, and he strengthened us for another day of living here in this world. How many times have there been in our lives when our faith was barely flickering, but our Jesus came along and in some special way fanned it again into a fire of love and trust? *“A bent reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not snuff out”* (3). You carry that Bible verse home today, okay? Then you pull it out and say it to yourself over and over again when you get down and the going gets tough. Remember this and thank God for it. This little baby Jesus grew up to be the strength of all of us weak sinners.

II. The savior of the lost

What will the baby grow up to be? God’s Word tells us that this baby also grew up to be the savior of the soul. Now concern about souls is probably not the foremost thought on most minds at the beginning of 2020. First on the minds of many is the economy, a higher paying job, a better standard of living. People worry about health issues, crime in their city, quality education for their kids, terrorism, etc. The world has many problems and there have

always been those who try to make Jesus a solver of all those problems. The world wants a Jesus who can fix all their troubles of the here and now, but if he doesn't grow up to be that, they want no part of him. But before we point our fingers too much at the world out there, let's look a little closer to home. Sometimes you and I can also think like the world, can't we? If things are not going so well for us here on this earth, then maybe Jesus isn't doing his job.

But what did the baby grow up to be? Did God send Jesus to be his answer to all the social and political problems of this world? No. Isaiah tells us that the baby grew up to be the savior of souls. Listen to Isaiah's recording of God the Father's words: "*I am the Lord. I am calling you in righteousness. I will grasp your hand, and I will guard you. I will appoint you to be a covenant for the people, to be a light for the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring the prisoners out of the dungeon and to bring those who live in darkness out of prison*" (6-7). Are those words talking about a social do-gooder? Those words are talking about a Savior from sin promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all their descendants. Those words are talking about a Savior who would rescue a whole world from being enslaved to sin, Satan, and death. What will the baby grow up to be? The angel Gabriel told Joseph: "*You shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins*" (Mathew 1:21).

We need to do much more than go "ooh" and "ahh" over the manger of Jesus. We begin this year remembering that Jesus grew up to be a savior from sin—my savior and your savior from our sins. There is only one reason we wouldn't find joy in that. And that would be if we don't see the ugliness and the awfulness of sin. Several years ago a broadcasting company in Finland had a contest to find out how many synonyms people could think of for certain words. First place in this contest went to a man who came up with 747 words for drunkenness. A man in prison was awarded second for sending in 678 words for adultery. He also won a prize for thinking up 170 synonyms for stealing. Another man knew 203 words for lying. Sounds like some kind of contest. There is nothing wrong with using synonyms. But you and I run into a real problem when we begin to minimize or excuse sin with other more polite and politically correct words. When we label it as a mistake, a goof-up, a blunder, a result of our upbringing or our environment, or even as a disease, we are missing the boat. Sin is sin. Sin is ugly. Sin is an awful thing. It offends God. It destroys our walk with God. It damns eternally anyone guilty of it. It is the world's greatest problem and the root cause behind all its other troubles. Sin is our greatest problem. It's behind every mess we make and every jam we get into. It's the biggest problem in our marriages and our family life. It's the biggest problem between teenagers and parents and between students and teachers. Worst of all, sin ruins our relationship with God. Let us never forget in this new year what the baby Jesus grew up to be. He came to die our death, to forgive us, and to bring us to heaven, not to pile up possessions for us, pad our pocketbooks, and make our life here a bed of roses. The baby came to be our Savior. Hold that blessed truth here in our hearts, and we will also know what to expect of our Lord in 2020, what to look for from our church in 2020, and what to give to the world around us this year.

III. The glory of the Lord

Isaiah reminds us of one more thing about this baby when he tells us at the end of our lesson that the baby grew up to be the glory of the Lord. Every father wants to be proud of his son and every good son wants to be a good reflection of his father. If that's true in our sinful condition, how much more true it is of Jesus and his heavenly Father. When Jesus grew up,

everything he did was to bring honor and glory to his Father. When he was that twelve-year-old in the temple, he asked: *“Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house”* (Luke 2:49)? At his baptism his Father declared: *“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased”* (Luke 3:22). At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus declared: *“For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me”* (John 6:38). And on the night before he died, Jesus could say to his Father: *“I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do”* (John 17:4).

Isaiah records these final words: *“I am the Lord; that is my name. I will not give my glory to another, nor my praise to idols”* (8). Our wicked world is always trying to shame God and rob him of his glory. The teaching of evolution, the legalized killing of the unborn, the push to give people the right to die on their own terms, all this denies God’s very existence and takes away from him the glory of being creator and ruler of all things. Our money-crazy and materialistic country turns farther and farther away from the Lord. Weakening Christian churches twist and deny and water down what is in this Book. And so how wonderful it is for us to start another year knowing that this little baby grew up to be the glory of the Lord. This little baby was also tempted to divide his loyalty between God and the things of this world, but Jesus brought only honor and glory to God’s name. Here is where he is our example. As sons and daughters of God himself through faith in his Son, we too will want to say with Paul: *“We make it our goal to please him”* (2 Corinthians 5:9). *“Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God”* (1 Corinthians 10:31). I read a story about a brilliant concert pianist who was performing for the very first time in public. The audience sat enthralled as beautiful music flowed from his disciplined and talented fingers. When he finished the audience rose to its feet and gave him a standing ovation—except for one old man in the front row. The pianist walked off the stage in despair. The stage manager praised his performance but the young man couldn’t be comforted. He could only say: “I was no good. It was a failure.” The manager replied: “Just look out there! Everyone is on their feet except for one old man.” “Yes,” said the young pianist, “but that old man is my teacher.” When it comes to our daily lives, what is it that’s most important to us? Is it our number one goal to have our Lord’s approval for those lives, like it was for that pianist to have his teacher’s approval? When we are out there rubbing shoulders with this world, are we always God-pleasers or is it more important to us to be man-pleasers? When you and I do what we please, does what you and I do please God? What a goal it would be for all of us to have in this new year to live each day to bring glory to our heavenly Father as Jesus did. By ourselves that is totally impossible. But the Bible also makes this great promise: (He will) *“equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ”* (Hebrews 13:21).

What will the baby Jesus grow up to be? We, who love this little baby, know what he grew up to be. May our lives in 2020 show that this Jesus is our strength in weakness, the savior of our souls, and the glory of the Lord. Amen.