The Child to Be Crucified
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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I'm sure if you are prone to the same experience I am as you read the daily newspapers that come out in our society and reflect on the attitudes and moral values of the day in which we live, you are very often shocked and sometimes even frightened about the things that go on in our society.

I thought that I was perhaps as desensitized to any shock as one could possibly be until I recently read an article that struck me as something I had not heard before in America, though I had heard of it in terms of ancient paganism. That was an article I read in a particular paper that said that there had been an uncovering of Satanic worship here in the United States and in the process of evaluating what was going on in this cult of Satanism, it had been determined that women were getting pregnant for the purpose of having children to be sacrificed. In other words, they were bearing children for no other reason than that the child would be offered on the altar as a sacrifice to Satan. A child born to be a sacrifice.

I thought to myself that, on the one hand, is an unthinkable reality. It is the reflection of a twisted heart and mind. That kind of wicked, murderous intention is a strange and hellish thing, to bear a child to offer as a sacrifice to Satan. Unimaginable. And yet, it has been done a myriad of times in the past in pagan religions in the world.

But on the other hand, as I thought more about it in the light of Christmas I realized that that heinous, unbelievable, unthinkable perversion is, in a strange way, somehow not unlike the very birth of Christ, for Christ was a child born to be sacrificed. Not born to be sacrificed to the whims of men, but born to be sacrificed to God. A child to be crucified. That's who was born in Bethlehem. A child born to die.

In fact He said, "For this cause came I into the world." From the very beginning, there was a shadow, the shadow of a cross, that cast itself over the manger in Bethlehem. And the symbol Christianity has always been the cross. I have never been in a Christian church where I have seen the symbol of a manger.

You see behind me, on the front wall of our church, the symbol of the Christian faith. It is a cross. That is our symbol. We do not focus on a cradle; we focus on a cross. We are not preoccupied with a manger; that is, with the birth of Christ. We are much more preoccupied with the death of Christ, his crucifixion.

And I cannot think about Christ coming into the world without thinking about why he came into the world. You cannot celebrate Christmas by simply focusing on the birth of Christ. It is the reason for which he was born that is so compelling, and which has become the very symbol of the Christian faith.

You might be interested to know that the church, from its earliest years, from its very birth, celebrated the death and resurrection of Christ. Continually, the death of Jesus Christ has been remembered in the communion service. Continually, the resurrection of Jesus Christ has been commemorated in the church as meeting on the first day of the week, that resurrection day, commemorating the day on which he came out of the grave. The church has always made a major preoccupation out of what has come to be known as Good Friday and Easter. All through the centuries has the church focused on the cross.

There is, however, no mention of any special observance of the birth of Christ until the fourth century. The first three centuries of the church are silent as to the church engaging in any kind of activity with regard to the birth of Christ. That was not an event to be particularly celebrated in the early church.

The first mention of any celebration of the birth of Christ appears in a Roman calendar dating in the fourth century, 336 A.D.

Interestingly enough, when the Romans began to identify a celebration of the birth of Christ, they attached it to another celebration which they called Saturnalia. Saturnalia began on December 17 and ended on December 25. There was a reason for it; in fact there were a couple of reasons for it. That particular time of the year marks the great change in the flow of the days of the year. The days are getting shorter and shorter and shorter and shorter and then all of a sudden, in what is known as the winter solstice, they turn and are reversed and they begin to get longer and longer and longer and longer.

The Romans celebrated then the worship of two of their deities. Saturn was the harvest god from which the term Saturnalia came, and they were thanking and celebrating Saturn because all the harvest was in, all the crops had been accumulated and stored away, all of that was done and it was time for what we now call the first day of winter.

The second deity they focused on was Mythras, because Mythras was the sun god. And since the days at that time would begin to lengthen, they would see more of the sun and, in anticipation of the coming spring, which would take them out of winter, they acknowledged that deity as well.

So in a combination of working Saturn and Mythras, they had the celebration known as Saturnalia.

I don't know if you're aware of the term solstice. It is a term often used. The winter solstice comes from the Latin, sol, which has to do with the word sun and the word sistera, which means to stop. It is the time in which the daylight hours stop getting shorter, and the sun begins to shine longer. This year it fell on December 21. That was the shortest day of the year, and after that the cycle is reversed.

And so they saw that as the ending of the reign, as it were, of the god Saturn, who had given them the harvest, and the beginning of the emerging sun, who would bring them the spring.

By the way, according to the Julian calendar of the Romans, the winter solstice occurred on December 25 and that is why they identified December 25 as what they called the birth day of the sun. The sun, they said, celebrated his birthday on December 25.

Somehow, they decided to incorporate the birthday of the Son of God into all of that and so we wound up with a December 25 celebration of Christmas which is clearly not the time Jesus was born. We cannot be specific as to the very date of his birth, but we can be quite certain that it was not in the winter time. In fact, the church through the centuries didn't even make a major issue out of the celebration of Christmas, realizing its somewhat pagan roots. It wasn't until mid-19th century in America that people began to celebrate Christmas in a big way and it was prompted and stimulated by commercial enterprises as much as anything.

You might also be interested to know that in 1643 in England, the English Parliament outlawed the celebration of Christmas because, they said, it was utterly pagan. It was later restored.

In 1659, about 16 years later, in the United States, the Massachusetts government outlawed the celebration of Christmas in Massachusetts, deeming it also a pagan celebration. And later, again, it was restored.

It is now, in our society, celebrated with a vengeance and for the most part, consummately motivated by commercial interests.

Now the reason I say all of that is not to demean the fact that we celebrate the birth of Christ, which certainly is right to do even though this is not the time and the way the world does it is not the way to do it either.

But all of that is simply to say that the focal point of the church has never been the manger. The focal point of the church has always been the cross. And the great celebration of the church has been the crucifixion, not the birth of Christ. This is the theme of Christianity. As wonderful, as profound, as amazing as the incarnation of Christ is, we don't preach the manger primarily; we preach the cross.

That is the message of Christianity. A child, born to be crucified.

Now with that in mind, would you open your Bible for a moment? I want to read you a passage out of I Corinthians 1, beginning at verse 18. I Corinthians 1:18. It says there, "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness. But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God."

Notice verse 23. "But we preach Christ crucified. To Jews, a stumbling block, and to Gentiles, foolishness."

Down in Chapter 2, verse 2, "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

Now, we note from these three verses that the message of the Apostle Paul was the cross and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. We also note that, to the world, it was foolish. But to those who believe, it is the power of God. We then summarize by simply saying, the powerful, life-transforming message of the cross is viewed by the world as being foolish.

And it is that thought on which I want to focus our thoughts this morning as we consider the significance of this day. Somehow, the cross has to be discussed in the framework of the manger. Somehow, we must get back to the reality that there is born, this day, in the city of David, a Savior. One who will save us from our sins. We must listen to the testimony of a dear and Godly old woman who says, "This child is for the redemption of Israel." This is a Redeemer. We must hear the testimony of one who says to a mother holding in her arms about a 40 or 41-day-old child names Jesus who hears these words, "That your own heart will be pierced also." The anticipation, the prophetic anticipation, of great pain coming to a mother over what will happen to her child.

All of these things anticipate the death of Christ. The church has always preached the cross. It has always preached the crucifixion. That is the message of Christianity, that God came into the world in human form, born into this world in order that He might die on the cross, bearing the sins of the world, as the Savior, the substitute, the representative of men who, in dying their death, provides for them His life. Salvation purchased on the cross.

Now when Paul says to the world this is foolishness, to the Jews a stumbling block, do you understand what that means? That's a very important thing to understand.

When we think about the cross, the closest we ever get to the real ignominy of the cross is to see a cross like that: a rather lovely, symbolic replica. Or perhaps to look at a necklace around our necks, or earrings dangling from the ears of someone, that are replicas of a cross. Sometimes we see a cross on the top of a church. Sometimes we see a cross at a cemetery. Sometimes we see a neon

cross on the top of a hill. And all the crosses that we see are empty crosses; they're all symbolic crosses. They have lost so much of their original stigma that we tend to see them as things of beauty rather than things of horror.

Did we understand the full horror of the cross, it is very unlikely that we would dangle crosses from our ears anymore than we would dangle electric chairs from our ears or small replicas of a gas chamber. It basically was an instrument of torture; it was an instrument of execution.

But it's hard for us to get in touch with that because we have never seen a crucifixion. Most of us rarely have ever seen, if ever, a death. We don't see people die; they die in rooms in hospitals. They don't die when we're around. It's very rare that we ever see a person die. It's extremely rare that we ever see a person suffer in death because before people die, they are sufficiently medicated so that they don't feel anything and we don't sense the reality of the throws of death. It is almost for sure that no one in this place has ever or will ever see a person executed. You'll not have that personal experience, nor will I.

So we don't really understand what was involved in the foolishness of the cross. When Paul uses the word foolish, he is speaking on behalf of his culture, of how the people of his day viewed the cross. The word, in Greek, comes from a word which we in English translate moron, or transliterate moron. Moras. Morae. It really does not have so much the idea of intellectual defect or even the idea of lacking transcendental wisdom, as it has the idea of something that is madness. Something that is utterly bizarre; stupid. That is almost maniacal to think of. That's the idea. It is something completely unacceptable, completely objectionable. Unthinkable.

And when Paul preached the cross and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, it was moronic to those people. It was madness. It was unthinkable folly to them. A deity being crucified? A perfect person being crucified? Worshipping a crucified god? Bizarre. Madness.

Let me see if I can give you enough background to help you to feel a little bit of the foolishness of the cross that must have captured the minds of Paul's contemporaries.

Crucifixion as a penalty was given for serious crimes and was very widespread in antiquity. In fact, as best we can ascertain, it was the commonest form of execution used by the Greek and the Romans in ancient times. It appears, by the way, in various forms among numerous different nations of people and it came to its apex of usage under the Romans, though the Greeks did use it as well. The Romans we can tell, from history, crucified approximately 30,000 people around the time of Jesus Christ.

Everyone was extremely aware of the cruelty of crucifixion. It was absolutely inescapable. And yet, even though it was inhuman in every sense, there seems to be nothing in the literature of Biblical

times to indicate that anybody had a desire to stop crucifying people, to prevent it, to find a new means to deal with criminals, to abolish this horrible kind of death. It was advocated by the political leaders as a way to punish political criminals; it was advocated by the military leaders as a way to punish the normal, run-of-the-mill criminals. It was a form of punishment inflicted only on the lower classes; none of the higher classes would be so humiliated as to be crucified. It belonged to slaves, violent riffraff, street criminals and rebels who sought to create insurrection against the government.

Now, the main reason that crucifixion was used and the reason it was the dominant form of execution was because it had such a powerful deterrent effect. Justice was exceedingly swift, which is the only way justice should be Biblically. And from the time that a criminal was caught and adjudicated to be guilty and then executed was a very brief time, just a matter of a few days.

And this swift and very, very cruel, terrifying kind of punishment acted as the strongest to keep others from committing crimes that would result in the same punishment.

Even though crucifixion was the very essence of obscenity in every sense, it did have its positive effect. It was a very good way for the ugly, primitive, lusting vengeance of ancient rulers to find its fulfillment as well as to entertain the vengeful, bloodthirsty masses of people who seem to get some glee out of seeing crucified victims, at least as much as they did seeing people ripped to shreds by lions in the Coliseum in ancient times.

There was an obscene lust for blood in those days. There was an overpowering sense of vengeance in the pagan religions of the time and crucifixion fulfilled those desires, as well as deterring other criminals.

Generally, before the Romans crucified someone, they would flog them with a whip embedded with stones so that their back would be lacerated and ripped open, exposing their internal muscles and organs, and that would cause a more profuse bleeding and create an almost excruciating agony. As one pinned against the cross, the only way you could breathe was to push yourself up by the weight of your feet which, of course, would rub your already lacerated back across the unsanded wood to compound the pain and the agony.

The victim inevitably, after the flogging, would carry his own cross to the place of execution, where he would be nailed to the cross. Sometimes nailed head down; sometimes nailed, stretched, almost like stocks in the form of an X. Sometimes after days of lingering on the cross, people would be covered oil and lit as torches. The slow, tortious kind of death is indescribable. It was the cruelest, as well as the commonest, form of execution.

It was also, sad to say, the commonest form of entertainment. If you wanted an evening's entertainment, all you had to do was leave your home and go down to the highway and watch the

crucified people suffer. You could gossip all you wanted. You could mock, you could laugh, you could spit and you could watch them in their agony.

For the most part, they were crucified in three places. They were crucified along the busy highways, they were crucified at the intersections at the conflux of two roads, and they were crucified on high places where they would be silhouetted against the sky so that people could see them at all times and from various places. It was to be entertainment. It was to be for everyone to see, so that it would show the whole world what happens to people who commit crimes. At relatively small expense and with great public effect, the criminal would be tortured for days in an unspeakable way.

They were, in the actual crucifixion, nailed to the cross through the wrists and the feet. They were then dropped into a hole in the ground and, generally speaking, the cross was very close to the ground; their feet would be just barely above the soil itself which allowed the dogs, the scavenger dogs and the wild animals, to have the grim pickings of their flesh as they chewed away at the people who were not even dead yet. Because they were nailed to the cross, carrion birds could also tear their flesh and chew on them and they couldn't do anything to prevent it. They were crucified naked, so that the humiliation was absolutely unthinkable. It was the supreme humiliation and pain and suffering that a human could devise or experience.

Crucifixion was then further aggravated by the fact that often its victims weren't buried, so to the ancients that was a great desecration. They were often crucified, as I said, very low to the ground and when they were still alive, they would be chewed on by the animals. When they were dead, they would continue to offer their corpses as carrion for those animals and when finally they were taken down from the cross, they would simply be thrown aside to become the grim pickings of further animals. The humiliation of all of this was unthinkable. It was the gravest dishonor that any human could suffer.

In fact, crucifixion was so totally identified with the low class that even the Latin word crux, which is the word cross, became a vulgar taunt, almost a swearword on the lips of slaves and prostitutes. It was so debased and so vile a way to die that no one in their right mind would ever think that a deity would die that way. And therein was the foolishness of the cross. To come along and preach that God came in human flesh and was crucified was absolute madness. Foolishness.

And so when Paul writes about the foolishness of the cross, he's not writing about some philosophical abstraction. Not at all. He's not writing about some theoretical opinion with regard to the implications of the cross. When he writes about the foolishness of the cross, he is writing about the absolutely unthinkable madness of trying to get people to believe that a deity would ever let men do that to him. Any deity who would wind up on a cross isn't a deity worth having. It would be so humiliating, so demeaning, dehumanizing, degrading, that no deity worth anything would ever allow such to be done to him.

In fact, Martin Hengel points out in his book on crucifixion that in all of Roman literature and in all of Greek culture, there is never indication that any god or any deity or any demon in the whole system was ever crucified. Absolutely unthinkable.

Justin writes and says, "In no case is there any information of a crucifixion with regard to all the miraculous powers of Zeus and his sons." The younger Pliny calls Christianity a form of amentia, like dementia, mental illness. He calls it a perverse and extravagant superstition. Another writer, Calalius, says that Christians propagate sick delusions; a senseless and crazy superstition that leads to old women's superstition. And, he says, not the least in the monstrosities of the Christian's faith is the fact that they worship one who was crucified.

The early opponents of Christianity mocked the Christians who worshipped a crucified God. How could a crucified criminal be a god, they said? There's one ancient record of a husband whose wife becomes a Christian and the husband presents a query as to what he can do with his Christian wife to somehow dissuade her from her belief in this crucified God. And so he calls out to the god Apollo and asks what to do and this was Apollo's response, "Let her continue as she pleases, persisting in her vain delusions, and lamenting a god who died in delusions, who was condemned by judges whose verdict was just and executed in the prime of life by the worst of deaths, a death bound with iron." That is, with nails. He says, let her alone. If she's that deluded, let her alone. In other words, you don't want her. Don't try to get her back. The delusion is too severe.

So the ancients, both commonplace and in the literature, mocked the cross. They mocked the dead god. They hated the stupidity of the Gospel. They were insulted by its foolishness. In what sense? It was foolish to them intellectually. Intellectually, it made no sense to their wisdom that a god would come into the world - a god would be powerful enough to come into the world, powerful enough supposedly to redeem the world, and then end up getting crucified. Intellectually unacceptable.

Secondly, it was emotional foolishness. The understood the experience of crucifixion. They understood the horror, the degrading character of it. They knew what the emotion was, of standing at the foot of a cross and watching that horror take place. And emotionally, they could not identify with a deity who was in such a degraded and debased position.

And thirdly religiously, or spiritually. They would have invented a lofty concept of a world-invading god. Had there been an incarnation, they would have devised into that religious concept the greatness of that deity and he would have done wonderful things in the world, no humiliating things.

So whether you look at it intellectually or whether you look at it emotionally or whether you look at it spiritually and religiously, the whole thing was absolute silliness, mania, madness to them.

But, the cross is at the very heart of Christianity. In spite of what everybody thought, in Chapter 2, verse 2, Paul says, "I determine to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." The world rejected it. Paul said, I preach it. He confronted the world with the cross and he knew what it would do, and he knew how they would respond and he knew it caused the Jews to stumble because they couldn't imagine their God, the true God, winding up in human flesh on a cross, unimaginable degradation of the true God. The Gentiles couldn't handle it either; it was madness to them. And yet Paul made it the heart of everything he said.

It's a good indication, folks, that you don't adjust the message to accommodate what you think the people would like to hear. By the way, apparently that's what some in the Corinthian church, the young Corinthian church, had done under the pressure of this being accused of being mad to believe such a thing. Apparently some in the Christian church at Corinth sought to escape the embarrassment of a crucified God and they were trying to low-key, downplay, hide the cross. And thus does Paul write to them and says in verse 18 of Chapter 1, listen, the Word of the cross is for those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved, it's the power of God. You can't sublimate it.

And that's why he says, "We preach Christ crucified, and we

know nothing among you but Christ crucified." We don't mitigate the cross. We preach the cross.

Paul, I think, is confronting here a somewhat serious accommodation to the culture wherein some of these Corinthian believers were taking the cross out of the Gospel to make it less offensive. But for Paul and the apostles, and for all true Christians, there is only one way to preach the Gospel and that is to preach the cross. It is the Gospel. It is the heart of the Gospel.

But you have to understand how the pagans felt. To believe that the one pre-existent Son of the one true God, to believe that this Son who was the mediator of creation and the redeemer of the world, which is what the Christians preached, to believe that that Son of the one God, who was one with God, who created and was to redeem the world, to believe that he had appeared in recent days, and that he appeared in out-of-the way Galilee, and that he appeared as a member of an obscure family of people who were so poor that when it came to the purification time, 33 days after the circumcision, when the mother had to offer a sacrifice, they didn't even have the money to buy a lamb so they had to offer two birds which were the cheapest sacrifices for the poorest people, to believe that this God came to this family in that obscure town in that obscure Galilee, and that this God had then wound up dying the death of a common criminal on a cross was utterly nonsense to their thinking. Madness. Christians were maniacs to think that anyone could buy such a theory.

The real gods of Greece and the real gods of Rome, at least the ones they thought were real, could be distinguished from mortal men by the fact that they were immortal. They didn't die. They had absolutely nothing in common with the sign of shame which was the cross. It was called in ancient times, by the way, the infamous stake, it was called the barren wood, it was called the criminal wood, it was called maximum malacrux, the terrible cross or the most maximum wicked cross. To imagine that a god could be bound in such ignominious fashion and executed in such shame was unthinkable.

And yet, everywhere Paul went, every preaching mission he ever took, he preached Christ crucified and everybody from Jerusalem west knew that Paul preached Christ crucified.

For educated people, it was absolutely preposterous that this could be the God of the universe.

And yet that's what Paul preached. The message of the crucified Christ is the message of Christianity. Listen to me. You say well, why did he have to go to the terrible extremity of the cross? Very simply answered this way. It shows you how debasing sin is. Your sin and my sin is so degrading, so humiliating, so shaming, so debasing that it took Jesus all the way to the cross. Phillipians 2:8. All the way to that naked, stark, ugly, tortuous, humiliating, degrading, demeaning experience. That's what sin did.

Now that's offensive to many people, to know that their sin is that bad. But that's the offense of the cross. That's offensive intellectually because what it says is, you can't do anything about your sin. Jesus Christ had to pay that kind of a penalty to free you.

The world doesn't want to approach God that way. They want to approach God on the basis of their own wisdom. God says no, I don't take you on the basis of your own wisdom. Your wisdom is foolishness with me. You must believe in the foolishness of the cross. You see, the cross humiliates men. It humiliates them because it disallows their works' righteousness. It disallows their wisdom in finding God. It shows how wretched and vile and wicked and low and filthy sin is. Look at Christ. Look what it did to him. And it was your sin and mine, not his.

And so, as Martin Hengel says, in the death of Jesus of Nazareth, God identified himself with the extremity of human wretchedness. If Jesus is wretched on the cross, it's because we are wretched in our sins.

And that is offensive to people. It's offensive intellectually to think of a deity being crucified. It's offensive religiously to think of the Savior of the world in that situation. It's offensive emotionally to have to face the fact that my sin is that bad that it did that.

So again I say, when Paul speaks of the foolishness of the cross, he is not talking in riddles, he is not talking in theological abstractions, he is expressing the harsh experience of his preaching and the

offense it caused, which was so direct that it led to his murder. He was murdered by people who wouldn't any longer tolerate the message.

But you see, in the spear of the Gospel, which must be cast into the heart into the heart of men, the cross is the spearhead. If you cut off the spearhead, the spear is blunted. It's impossible to disassociate talk of the atoning death of Jesus on the cross and still give the Gospel. The spearhead can't be broken off the spear.

It is the cross that offends. You say, well we don't want to offend. Yes, we do want to offend. You can take the offense out of the Gospel, it doesn't penetrate. It doesn't penetrate. It is the cross that is so offensive because what the cross says is, your sin is this bad. What the cross says is, your goodness is of no help. What the cross says is what you think would be a wise, religious way to God is useless. Here is the foolishness of the cross, the only way to God. It literally blasts man's wisdom, it blasts man's righteousness and it blasts his sense of goodness.

So when Paul preaches the cross and throws - when Paul preaches the Gospel, he throws the spear. The spearhead is the cross. I believe with all my heart that he deliberately provoked his opponents. He had to, because if you preach the cross you will provoke people. If you tell them how sinful their sin is, how shameful their sin is, what it cost God's Son to purchase their salvation, if you show them how that, at best, their wisdom is stupidity with God and the only way to God is through the foolishness of the cross, you have pulled them down off their proud high horse. It is a very offensive Gospel.

And you take the offense out of it if you want, but people aren't going to get saved by a Gospel that is less than offensive. It has to offend their sin. It has to offend their self-righteousness. It has to offend their human wisdom. And though mocked by man, it is the profound work of God.

A number of years ago in some archeological digs on the Palatine hill in Rome, some archeologist came across an interesting etching in some stone. Quite a fascinating picture. As they cleaned it off and looked at it, they discovered this. It pictured a slave, and the slave was kneeing. And the slave was kneeling down and looking up at a cross. And on that cross, crucified, was a jackass. A donkey. And the caption underneath the etching said, and it even gave the slave's name, Alex Amenas worships his god. That's what they thought of the crucified Christ. A jackass. Stupidity. Foolishness. Alex Amenas worships his God. A donkey on a cross. A mockery of the cross.

In its own way, the world still mocks the cross. It's still offended by the cross. That was illustrated - some years ago I read about a little church, it may be a fanciful story, but I read about a little church in the English countryside that was established several hundred years ago. When it was first established they wanted to have no doubt about what they were preaching and so they built a little churchyard around the church itself, and on the front gate they put two pillars and across the pillars

an arch. And across the arch it said, We Preach Christ Crucified.

And as the years went by, the church changed and in the early years they had planted some ivy as the story goes and as the church changed, the ivy grew. And there came a time when people no longer wanted to talk about the cross. The preacher wanted to talk more about Jesus as the example, Jesus as the model of human virtue and the ivy grew and covered the last word. And the simple little arch simply said, We Preach Christ.

And the years went by and the leadership changed and the ivy kept growing. And there came leadership in the church were very concerned about social issues, very concerned about psychological solutions, and that was their message. And the ivy grew and covered the next word, and all that was left was "We Preach."

We preach. There's a real sense in which that has been the story of the church even in our own country. How much do we hear about the cross? Oh, we hear a lot of preaching about a lot of issues. Once in awhile we even hear someone preaching about Christ. But how about we preach Christ crucified? I Corinthians 1:23. We preach Christ crucified.

Yes, offensive. Foolish for those who are perishing. But to those who are being saved it is what? The power of God.

It's, as I said, an absolutely unthinkable thing to imagine a woman getting pregnant in order to bear a child for a sacrifice to Satan. But praise God, there was one virgin, one time in human history, who was given by the Holy Spirit a child born to be sacrificed to the true God on your behalf and mine. To bear our sins.

That is the message of Christmas. That is the message of Christianity. A child to be crucified. And to those who are not believing that, it is foolish. For those who are being saved, it is the power of God. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, this morning we have again had our eyes opened to the great reality of why the Child was born. Why it is that, in the writing of the New Testament record, the first 30 years are basically skipped over to rush to the end of His life. And even the bulk of material in the Gospel record emphasizes the events leading to His death and resurrection, because that is the heart of our message. We thank you that the symbol of Christianity is not a cradle, it's a cross, because it was on that cross that Jesus bore our sins in His own body. It was on that cross that He was our substitute, bearing the fullness of the wrath that you poured out against Him. It's on that cross that He purchased our redemption, and we thank you. This Christmas Day, Lord, we thank you for the gift of your Son, a Child to be crucified. And may we this day see that shadow of the cross even looming over the manger, and may the Christ of Christmas truly be to us our crucified Lord. May we

experience the power of God that comes to those who believe in His death and resurrection. We pray in His dear name. Amen.

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