Affirming Our Faith through the Apostles' Creed
I Believe in the Life Everlasting

Text: 1 Timothy 1:15-16 -- The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

Introduction: I know this is going to sound a little weird to you, but today, on the eve of Memorial Day, I want to start this message by focusing on the most popular holiday in the world -- Christmas! IN FACT, I WOULD SAY THE PASSAGE I JUST READ MOMENTS AGO BEGS US TO AS ITS FOCUS IS ON JESUS COMING INTO THE WORLD! It may or may not surprise you to learn that over 160 countries celebrate Christmas globally. Of course, what makes it so special for Christians is that we celebrate the birth of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. **Prior to His incarnation** (*the word means "in flesh*), **it had been four hundred years since God had last spoken to His people**. Think about it, that's a long time -- four centuries of relative silence. But in the fields outside of Bethlehem on that holy night, He allowed His voice to be heard again in the announcement of the angel to the shepherds ... **Fear not for I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.** Unfortunately, there were a lot of people in Israel at the time who were caught unaware of what was happening. **They were just going about their business, likely registering for the same census as Joseph and Mary**. Even those in Bethlehem had little inclination to pay attention to a young couple who just happened to be having a baby in a manger because there was no other room available for them. The Biblical record tells us that the only people who came to see the child on the night He was born were the shepherds themselves. **Honestly, it's sad that so many missed it ... the day that God became a living, breathing human being, but at least they had an excuse. After all, four hundred years of silence is a lot to overcome**. Today, however, there are still many people who miss Christmas ... not the giving of gifts and the celebration of family traditions (***you may be surprised to learn that eight out of ten non-Christians celebrate Christmas***) ... but the day that marks the advent into our world of the Son of God. The American storyteller **Garrison Keillor** is one of them. A while back he claimed that you don't have to believe in Jesus to celebrate Christmas. Keillor said, "***Although you may decide that instead of Christmas carols, you are going to hold hands and breathe in unison, Christmas will still live deep in the cockles of your heart—or actually in your neo-cortex, stored as zillions of neuron impulses … It's [your brain] that sends tears to your eyes when you smell the saffron cookies that your grandma used to***

make or you sing Silent Night. So, Christmas is number one lights, number two food, number three song, number four being with people you like. You need no more."

That's one opinion. **Christian pastor and author Tim Keller comments on Keillor's take on Christmas**: "***Keillor is saying that it doesn't matter whether you believe in God or not ... All the good feelings of Christmas are just a reaction in our brain (anyway). But here's why that doesn't work. I know enough about Garrison Keillor to know that he is very upset with cruelty and prejudice. But if it's really true that there is no God, if there is no supernatural (world) or miracles, and if everything is a function of natural causes—if that is all true, then it is also true that love, and joy, and even cruelty and prejudice are just all chemical reactions stored in our brain. Keillor is against cruelty and prejudice, but if it's true that everything is just chemistry, then how in the world can you say there's a moral difference between love and cruelty, between kissing someone or killing someone? They're both nothing but neuro-chemical responses. If there is no God, and if Christmas is all about lights, songs, and being with nice people and your neo-cortex going crazy about it, then I don't see how Keillor can stand up and say that there is something wrong with cruelty and prejudice. (In fact) he can't do it. (You see,) without the (Christian beliefs) behind Christmas, you lose the core meaning of it***." This morning, I want to review with you why the historical event of the birth of Jesus Christ matters to all of us ... what it accomplished for mankind and how it can change our eternal destinies. **I'm going to argue from the Scriptures that Tim Kellor has it right, not Garrison Keiler. The meaning of Christmas cannot be separated from the teachings of the Bible**.

Christ's PURPOSE in coming into the world (**The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners -- 1 Timothy 1:15**). As I shared a few moments ago, most people celebrate Christmas including even a high percentage of the unchurched. But how many really understand what God was doing when He sent His Son (Jesus) into the world? It seems to me that to understand His purpose you have to be a little bit of a student of the Bible. If you read the account given in the Gospel of Luke about the birth of Jesus, you discover that the Angel of the Lord called Him "**SAVIOR**." This was a word borrowed from the Romans who used it of **their emperor**, a man trusted to rescue them from any perceived threat to their well-being. **Jesus came to deliver His people too, but not from any potential attack from without. He came to rescue humanity from the destructive presence and power of sin that lurks within all of us and brings upon mankind God-imposed guilt and condemnation**. The title "**CHRIST**" confirms this. It means "**Messiah**" or "**Anointed One**." The baby in the manger was none other than the long-awaited deliverer promised to Abraham (**and through your offspring all the nations of the earth will be blessed -- Genesis 22:18**), and to King David (**your throne will be established forever -- 2 Samuel**

7:16). He is the One about whom the prophet said, "**The Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and give birth to a Son and will call Him Immanuel -- God with us -- Isaiah 7:14**." The name "**JESUS**" also is very telling. It means "**The Lord is Salvation**." Jesus came into the world with a grand and praiseworthy purpose in mind ... to save sinners and bring us with Himself to heaven. **Laura Demarest**, in an article in **the Washington Post written by her pastor** (7-6-18), shares what it was like for a group to be trapped deep underground in a dark, flooded cave in Indiana and the relief they felt when rescued: **In the end, a team of fellow cavers and trained rescue personnel came to our aid as the waters were receding. They brought us food, water, warm clothes, and smiles. One later commented that when he reached our little hovel, the smell was fantastically terrible from all of us clustered together for so long in our stinky cave gear. But he said it was the best thing he had ever inhaled. We made the long trek out of the cave, all of us under our own power, but greatly buoyed by the rescuers who assisted along the way. It took at least four hours of exhausted wading, scrambling, and crawling for all of us to exit. We were greeted on the surface by relieved and jubilant family and friends, bright lights, medical personnel, fried chicken, and a very inviting campfire. It was surreal. I wanted to celebrate with friends. I wanted to go home and sleep forever**. Then her pastor, **Paul May**, says this: So that we would be where Jesus is, he first came to be where we are, to rescue us. I'm certain that the world He entered literally stunk way more than the heavenly splendor He left behind. He came to be with us, and He gave temporary comforts and healing to those He found. They were temporary because they were only meant to point to the party awaiting us up at the surface. Friends and family, fried chicken, a warm fire: they are only the beginning of imagining what He has prepared for those who love him. That was Christ's purpose in coming into our world. Now, let's consider another important truth that comes from our passage. (Review: Christ's purpose)

Christ's PATIENCE toward those in the world (...Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display His perfect patience as an example -- 1 Timothy 1:15-16). **If anyone here thinks you're not worth saving, that you've broken too many commandments and done too many cruel things to others, this passage tells us otherwise. Jesus is the best possible evidence that God is merciful**. That's what the Apostle Paul is arguing here. If anyone was beyond the saving grace of God it was him! ***In his opinion, he was the worst of all sinners***. Think about that for a moment. I'm sure there were murderers around in the 1st century. In fact, **King Herod** might have taken more lives than anyone when he demanded that all the boys in Bethlehem two years old and younger be put to death (**A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted because they are no more -- Matthew 2:18**). There were also adulterers, liars, thieves, gossips, racists and a

whole lot of other self-centered people. ***Yet Paul said he was number one on God's 10 most wanted list***. What did he do? Well, in his zeal for the law as a Pharisee, he rejected the early Christian claim that people could be saved by grace through faith. Paul believed that the only way to get to heaven was to keep all of God's rules. He was so convinced of this that he persecuted followers of Christ, arresting some and overseeing the illegal murder of others. **Later, when he considered how off base his life had been, Paul knew that were it not for the mercy and patience (long-suffering) of God toward him, he would have no hope, no reason to believe he was worth saving**. ***Today when people say they're not worthy of being loved, a lot of people try to correct their self-image and restore their sense of self-esteem***. But a study published in the UK reveals that despite our best efforts children continue to struggle with **low self-esteem, loneliness, or deep levels of unhappiness**. A free, private counseling hotline for children and teens up to the age of 19 said it was contacted 35,244 times last year (roughly a hundred times a day) by children struggling with how to be happy. In the organization's 30-year history, general unhappiness is only a recent trend. Previously, self-harm and eating disorders were among the most common causes for children to contact the helpline. **But today, unhappiness is strongly connected with the drive to keep up one's image on social media**. One expert noted, "***It is clear that the pressure to keep up with friends and have the perfect life (image) online is adding to the sadness that many young people feel on a daily basis***." Society's answer to this profound sense of loneliness and unhappiness is to give kids more self-esteem. Is it possible that we've got it all wrong? That we shouldn't be teaching anyone to focus on self-image at all. Perhaps the best thing to do is, **like Paul**, acknowledge that **there is something terribly wrong in the heart of every one of us** (the presence of sin) and that **what we need is not a better self-image to keep us from thinking about it, but a Savior who can deliver us from sin and lead us to a greater understanding and appreciation of the mercy and patience of God**. So, let's review what we learned so far ... **Christ's purpose** was to save sinners ... and **Christ's patience** is seen in His continuing offer of mercy and grace to sinners.

Christ's PROMISE for those in the world (... Christ Jesus might display His perfect patience as an example ... to those who were to believe in Him for eternal life -- 1 Timothy 1:16) All this talk about the mercy and patience of God by Paul is meant to lead to something really good for the rest of us. When we see how He treated the worst of all sinners, it should lead us to the same conclusion as Paul... **the only response that makes any sense for us is to believe in Jesus and receive the promise of eternal life**. This is the reason that Jesus became a human being in the first place! If the Jews (and others) had been able to save themselves through the keeping of the Law, it would not have been necessary for Him to be born in a manger. **The fact that Jesus became one of us that He might rescue us from sin is God's way of giving humanity a big "F" on our moral report cards**. The only thing we've accomplished is to prove that we are rebels at

heart who face eternal death as a result. That's why we need to receive God's merciful gift in the sacrifice of His Son. Then we will find peace and everlasting life.

Three thoughts about the word "AMEN": This is the last word of the Apostles' Creed. We hear it so often that it loses all meaning. For most of us, it signals that the prayer is over and it's time to eat. **They treat it like the caboose on a train at the intersection of Rt 83 and Grass Lake Road that tells us that it has finally passed and we don't have to wait in our cars any longer**. But word "**amen**" isn't in the creed just to tell us that it's finished. The writers had more in mind in that. The word actually means "**so be it**" or "**I agree**" or "**Yes, it is as you say**." Found at the end, it brings us to three important conclusions regarding the Apostles' Creed.

1. **When we say "Amen" we're acknowledging the creed is <u>true</u>**. With each statement starting at "***I believe in God the Father Almighty maker of heaven and earth..***." and ending with "***I believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting***," we <u>could</u> conclude with a hearty '**amen**.' When we say it at the end, it's our way of ***<u>agreeing completely</u>*** with the entire statement of faith. There isn't a single part of it that we would question. **We may believe there's more truth from the Scriptures that could be confessed, but everything found in the creed is true**.
2. **When we say "Amen" we're confessing we <u>believe</u> the creed**. Some people say the creed because it's part of their religious tradition. I know the church I grew up in said it very often, but I'm sure for some it was just another part of the service like the Lord's Prayer that we mumbled through without ever really thinking about it. The word "**amen**" is inserted, however, because every person at some point has to decide whether or not he actually believes what he's saying. The final word, then, was the church fathers' way of forcing the confessor to make his choice and publicly testify that he believes every line of it.
3. **When we say "Amen" we're proclaiming our faith in Christ**. In **Revelation 3:14**, the Apostle John writes this of our Lord, "**These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation**." Did you catch it? Jesus is actually called the "**amen**." If you say it, you're telling Jesus that you believe He is the Son of God who came into our world as a tiny baby born in a manger at Bethlehem. That in His incarnation He willingly became a human being so that He could ultimately save human beings from the penalty of sin -- eternal separation from God -- and give us life everlasting that begins the very moment you receive Christ into your life. HAVE YOU PUT YOUR TRUST IN JESUS AS SAVIOR AND LORD? IF NOT, YOU CAN RIGHT NOW.

Conclusion: We started this message with some talk about Christmas. Let's finish with some talk about the sacrifices recognized by our American military personnel that we

honor this Memorial Day. During World War II, a **US Army Transport Ship carrying 902 servicemen** was struck by a German submarine. Panic and chaos quickly set in as men raced for lifeboats in the **frigid waters off the coast of Greenland**. In the midst of pandemonium, **four Army chaplains** worked to calm the frightened men. On the deck of the ship, they worked to distribute life vests to soldiers escaping into the frigid waters. When they ran out, each minister simultaneously removed their jacket and gave them to the soldiers. They didn't call out for soldiers who were in their particular tradition. They simply gave their jackets to the next men in line. One survivor would later say, "***It was the finest thing I have seen or hope to see this side of heaven***." As the ship went down, survivors in nearby rafts could see the four chaplains--arms linked and braced against the slanting deck. Their voices could also be heard offering prayers and singing hymns. Of the 902 men aboard, only 230 survived. Congress later conferred a posthumous **Medal for Heroism** upon the four chaplains. Before boarding **the Dorchester**, one of the chaplains was overheard asking his father to pray for him, "**Not for my safe return, that wouldn't be fair. Just pray that I shall do my duty … never be a coward … and have the strength, courage and understanding of men. Just pray that I shall be adequate**." I SEEM TO REMEMBER OUR LORD DOING SOMETHING SIMILAR – HE TALKED WITH HIS FATHER BEFORE HE LAID DOWN HIS LIFE TO BRING US LIFE. Because God became a man in the person of Jesus Christ and then as a man died on the cross for our sins, everyone of us who has trusted in Him as Savior and Lord can rejoice that we have life – abundant and everlasting.

NOW JOIN ME AND LET'S DECLARE WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE LIFE EVERLASTING BY SAYING TOGETHER THE APOSTLES' CREED.

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I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ His only Son, Our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into Hades; The third day He rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and **the life everlasting**. Amen.