

“Don’t Let the Grinch Steal Your Christmas”

Luke 2: 10-11



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Despite the grinch out there who try to steal Christmas by getting really serious and stressed out about everything; ready to strike down Santa Claus and close all the department stores - almost all the stuff we experience now, and as a child, regarding Christmas is and was very good. The best story I have ever heard at Christmas was Santa telling about his belief and salvation in Christ! Almost everything I see going on around me today associated with Christmas is also really good. Sure, I wish the department stores would advertise Merry Christmas instead of Happy Holidays. But, even if a part of the world does not have our Crucified Christ in the exact center of things (and historically it never has) Christmas is still about Christ, we just need to rediscover it.

The Nativity scene is one of the most familiar images of Christmas. There is a feeling of warmth and peace to that scene - a scene that to many people summarizes the essence of Christmas. It is as if the nativity scene communicates a little bit of what God is all about. For many people that understanding comes not through any knowledge that they may have about the Christian message – but through the memories that they have attached to Christmas - through the experiences that they had as a child.

I can remember as a small child walking into my grandparents house as one of the last families to arrive and having all of my aunts, uncles, and cousins there. All 26 of us piled into a small three bedroom farm house. I remember the gatherings for meals; sitting on top of the counter by the mixer-stand “helping” with the mashed-potatoes.

I remember staying up too late on Christmas Eve in San Antonio, Texas and hearing Santa’s sleigh go by my house. I ran to the front yard to only hear distant sleigh bells but seeing snow covered sleigh tracks in my front yard.

I remember the live nativity on Sunday morning and the story of the real gift- which came from God, the baby Jesus in the manger who somehow changed the world.

The nativity made it all possible.

Christmas for many of us, even those of us who had no attachment whatsoever to the church, was a time in which something special happened - our family drew closer together - and our dreams looked as if they might come true. Many here today may not have had much exposure to Christ growing up - maybe church was only for Christmas and Easter - Christ was still somehow important to it all. Santa Claus, despite his incredible attractiveness – just couldn’t compete - and still can’t compete with the Christ child - even among the dominate commercial society.

I want us to rediscover Christmas this advent season. You are going to hear a lot about advent in the next 4 weeks and you may not even know what advent means. I didn’t for years. It means the four-week period

ending on December 25, Christmas Day. It is a time for penance and reflection. Advent actually opens the liturgical year, appropriately as a time of waiting for the coming of the savior. It is a time of anticipation.

From Isaiah 9

The people walking in darkness
 have seen a great light;
 on those living in the land of the shadow of death
 a light has dawned.

For to us a child is born,
 to us a son is given,
 and the government will be on his shoulders.
 And he will be called
 Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

As much as we may love the material stuff - the stuff we associate with Santa – God built us in such a way that we love the spiritual stuff more. And Christ, the baby Jesus - well somehow he represents all the spiritual stuff - He is that in which we place all of our hopes our dreams and yes, even our fears. He is Christmas! Glory be to God for that!

And what is more spiritual - even to the untrained eye, to the eye who knows nothing about the cross and the resurrection, or the sermon on the mount and the parable of the prodigal son, than the nativity scene? Let's get practical here. I am a practical guy – so what does it mean to me and you today?!

We see in the birth of Christ a gathering together of many things that are very encouraging:

We see poor shepherds - folk who must tend their sheep at night, folk who are separated from their families by the demands of their ill paid work, being specially invited by angels to see the new-born Messiah, we see them in the warmth of the candle lit stable to be the first to discover what God has created - the birth of child – a child of great promise.

We see also the wise men from far away, men who in their wealth and wisdom realize that there is something more, something greater, than that which they already know or have, we see them find that something greater - we see them find the king that they seek, and kneel in awe before him - though he is but a baby..

We see Joseph - a village carpenter - a man who works hard for a living - a man who struggles to do what is right by the girl he loves - a man of integrity - standing next to Mary - strong and silent, protective and deeply caring.

And we see Mary herself - a simple girl - radiant in her motherhood - storing up in her heart all the things that are said to her about her child.

Who cannot be moved? Have you ever thought about placing yourself in that scene? Think about it. We are no different than those in the nativity. I think that scene still lives today through us? While Jesus is not the babe in the manger anymore we are still the characters of the nativity, are we not? There is tremendous power in the nativity scene, a power that could not be overcome then by Herod's fierce words nor can it be overcome today by the sounds of war. The nativity is a power that cannot be quenched by a million advertisements, nor by a billion people seeking ever more wealth and luxury.

But you, Bethlehem, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” - Micah 5:2

Christmas bears to us the gifts of God. And it bears those gifts in ordinary ways. A child is born, in a place called Bethlehem. On him is the hope of the nations. If Christmas is no big deal anymore then why do I hear the words of Isaiah still ring in my head. Even 700 years before Jesus, this prophet said that the Messiah would have an impact on the entire world, that it would be through him that God’s salvation would be brought “to the ends of the earth:”

“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” - Isaiah 49:6.

The first religion to be evangelized to people worldwide was Christianity. Even today, Christianity is still the only religion that has a significant presence on all six inhabited continents. Why is this significant? Because, Christianity literally is being taken “to the ends of the earth”. All of the ordinary places, to all the ordinary people. The nativity is not a thing of the past it is in the present.

The ordinary is the place in which all the gifts of God are born. The small towns like Bethlehem and Lubbock, Texas; the simple folk like Mary and Joseph, and you and I bear the gifts of God. What gifts are you taking to the world this week? In what way are you going to allow God to use you to change someone’s life? In what way are you going to be a part of the living nativity?

Bear the gifts of God. And when you offer these gifts - you give birth to them, in every act of love and in every communication of hope that we make to one another. Don’t let the grinch steal your Christmas. Care for one another with what God has given you and worship the Lord born in a manger - born to set you free.