

The Spirit of Christmas

First Christian Church
-The Rev. David Archer

A long time ago, when God's people had their backs against the wall and their feet on a rock, God promised them hope; when justice could not be found, he gave them righteousness; when war and pain and suffering was the norm, the Lord offered his amazing peace. Isaiah the Prophet records the event in Isaiah 9:1-7, "For unto us a child is born, a son is given...and He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. He will reign on David's throne...establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness..." Of course Matthew and Luke record the fulfillment of that prophecy from a narrator's point of view, but John tells us what God actually did for us, on our behalf. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us" (John 1:1 & 14). Not just a good man, not just another created being, but God himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, the very creator of all that there is, saw our helpless plight and chose love over retribution and became one of us with all the limitations of the flesh, all its frailties, in order that he might most perfectly communicate himself to us and thereby provide a means of escape from our own predicament. Christmas is the time that love came to earth. And the miracle of Christmas is that it's not confined to a particular day of a particular month. For each time we choose to express God's love in our circumstances, each time we choose to give sacrificially, as the opportunity presents itself we allow once again that love of God to be birthed in us anew through the person of his son, Jesus Christ.

My prayer for this community is that this coming year we will see the love of God manifested in the hearts of ourselves and our neighbors to such an extent that we will no longer carry the title of the number-one county for child abuse and substance abuse in the Northwest, but rather we will be known for our charity and compassion for one another. This will happen if we allow Jesus Christ to prevail in our lives.

God bless you and Merry Christmas to all.

lone United Church of Christ

-The Rev. David Zaworski

Sunday, Dec. 24 family worship services will be held at 10 a.m., (not the usual 11 a.m.). At 5 p.m. communion will be served during the family candlelight service. The Rev. Caroline Zaworski will be leading this service. Communion will also be served during a 10:30 p.m. candlelight service.

God? Here? This helpless new-born baby is God? The message of Christmas affronts our common sense and calls for new ways of seeing the world, new ways of sharing and celebrating the good news of "God with us." As one approach to that new vision for Christmas, I offer you the following adapted from "Alternatives".

Santa Doesn't Come To The Poor. Jesus Does.

Santa Doesn't Come To The Poor. For every child who is thrilled with a new bicycle or pair of roller skates there is a child who feels neglected, unloved and inferior because his or her parents can't afford to buy presents. For all parents who overspend to give their children a "good" Christmas, there are parents who go into serious debt in response to cultural pressure to buy gifts.

Jesus did. "You know how gracious the Lord Jesus Christ was. Though he was rich, he became poor for your sake." (II Corinthians 8:9) When we consider that the Santa Claus tradition is observed in conjunction with the birthday of Jesus Christ, who came to "bring good news to the poor" and who warned the non-poor of the dangers of materialism, the irony in our Christmas celebrations becomes truly overwhelming.

Will you? As Paul continued in his letter to the Corinthians, "I do not mean to be easy upon others and hard on you, but to equalize the burden, and in the present situation to have your plenty make up for what they need,

so that some day their plenty may make up for what you need, so things may be made equal..." There are ways to celebrate the birth of Jesus that honor him and the work he came to do.

Perhaps we can all take some small steps this year, and more in years ahead, to break the hold of celebrating Santa, and instead to find our joy in serving God who chose to be born poor, helpless, and homeless so many years ago.

All Saints Episcopal Church

-Merilee McDowell, Layperson

Holy Eucharist, officiated by Fr. John Wallace, will be held at 10:30 a.m. The children's Christmas program will be held during the service. Everyone is welcome to attend.

Prepare-prepare. We hear this so much this time of year. We cook, bake, buy, eat, wrap, give, receive, decorate and pray. I don't know about you but it seems like I always let the most important part of preparation go undone, and that is prayer. And, boy, do we need prayer in our lives. Prayer is the beginning of helping us to "Prepare Our Hearts" this season. I think sometimes in all the busyness we just look forward to Christmas being over, but, you know what? Our lives need Christmas, yes, our lives need Christmas. Not the Christmas that the world presents us or the frustrations that we put on ourselves but the Christmas that prepares us for the coming of Christ again and again because "He is coming again."

In the book "Prepare Our Hearts" by Muriel Kurtz, Muriel states—"I see Christmas and the time of preparation as a wonderful time to grow and change which can contribute both to self-discovery and to appreciation of those about us." Her words have helped me to change in a small way but, I hope, in a special way. I've tried to see the beauty in the preparation of Christmas when my daughter spills flour or sugar all over the floor, or when egg shells somehow fall into the batter "by accident." A perfect example is last Sunday after church as we decorated our Christmas tree in the sanctuary and all the children helped. The garland was used as a jumping rope, Christmas balls were found clumped together on the tree and the littlest one always wanted to put one right up on top. Those times are what Christmas is all about—coming together and sharing with one another in the process of preparation.

We pray that this Christmas season will be a time of "wonderful preparation" for everyone as they prepare their hearts and join with one another with love and thanksgiving.

Heppner Christian Missionary Fellowship

-Pastor Lynda L. Crane

"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."

As we approach this Christmas season, let us remember the Christ of Christmas. His name is Jesus, the Christ. Let us also remember the reason he came. And God became flesh and dwelt among us. JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Yes, there is pleasure in sin, for an hour. But abundant life comes to us as we surrender our lives to him. The King of Kings, The Lord of Lords. There is salvation in no other name. No man can come unto the Father, but through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that his people die for lack of knowledge. As we walk through this life, it is important that we walk on the right road. When we get off of that road, we find death and destruction. God has given us a road map for our life. The Bible. It is a foolish person that sets off on a journey, without consulting a map to find out the direction they should go. What an important journey our life is. We have only one life. It is important that we consult the word of God, and follow the path he would have us to walk on. Satan comes to kill, to steal and to destroy. Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. He loves us so much. His love is constantly reaching out to all of us, saying, come and follow after me. I love you with an everlasting love. My words are life to those that will find them. Yes, it is a wonderful time of the year, when we can pause and remember the time of Christ's birth. Knowing that he is the same yesterday, today and forever. That he still saves his people from their sins.

Hope-Valby Lutheran Church
-Pastor DeWayne M. Bey

Hope and Valby Lutheran Churches will have Christmas Eve candle lighting services, Sunday, December 24, at 6 p.m. at Hope with Holy Communion and 9 p.m. at Valby. Sunday morning worship for the fourth Sunday in advent will be December 24 at 9 a.m. at Valby and at 11 a.m. at Hope. All are invited to attend and participate in these services.

The birth of Jesus Christ was a public event. There were no closed doors to whomever appeared and it was announced spectacularly from the heavens. A special star, far in advance, brought the rich and wise from afar. A host of angels, at the time of the event, brought the poor and simple from close by. Those who read the signs recognized its meaning. No receptionist stood guard to ask questions and qualify those who came to see. It was an event for all the world, which was represented by a few from society's extremes.

Ancient and later prophecies were meant to prepare people in their hearts for his coming. The prophecies also explained his purpose in advance that unfolded before the eyes of the world. Today his attainments have been well published in every place on earth. His name, the one above every name, is translated into every language. It means Savior. His gift is the forgiveness of sins before God and everlasting life. Whoever considers these gifts of value may receive them from him. "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name (Jesus of Nazareth) under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12).

Church of the Nazarene

On Sunday, Dec. 24, a puppet show will be held at 9:45 a.m. Everyone is invited to attend.

Heppner United Methodist Church

-Pastor Gary Etchison

The United Methodist Church will have worship service Sunday, Dec. 24 at 10:30 a.m. The church choir will sing "Born, Born in Bethlehem". A Christmas eve candlelight service will be held Dec. 24 at 7:30 p.m. The choir will sing "The Jesus Gift".

Christmas is a time in which both families and friends share in feelings of joy, and a special sense of closeness. The exchanging of cards, and gifts during the Christmas season enables us to express the love we human beings have for each other.

It is also a time to gain that same feeling in relation to God's presence within our lives. The birth of the baby Jesus, the Messiah, is God's expression of the divine love God has for the entire creation that God is responsible for.

As we enjoy this holiday season within the boundaries of the love we have for each other, we need to remember an added dimension: God's love for us.

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