

PEACE ON EARTH GOOD WILL TO ALL MANKIND

St. Patrick's Church

'Choose Christ'

When we think of Christmas we think of carols, shopping, gathering of friends and relatives, and food. It is a joyous time.

All of that should remind us of the joy of the first Christmas. The surroundings were not the best, but the people involved were to become the most famous in history - the Christ Child, Mary and Joseph. Even those who only came in passing have never been forgotten - the shepherds, and the Magi.

Yet not all were happy at the birth of the Savior. Nations would come to recognize Christ as the light of the world, but for Herod that light would expose the evil in his life. So, for Herod the time of the birth of the Savior was a time for plotting to destroy the Child.

Perhaps the struggle of Herod is like the struggle that exists between good and evil in our world. Perhaps it is indicative of the struggle each one of us makes with our evil inclinations. We, too, have choices to make. Like the Wise Men we can follow the star of Bethlehem that leads to the Prince of Peace, or we can follow the road of darkness and evil. We can follow the star through the difficulties, hardships and sufferings of life, or become entrapped in our own desires, our own weaknesses, our own addictions.

Christmas is a time when we know that Jesus went before us. He offers each one hope. St. Paul puts it well in his second letter to the Corinthians: "...though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich." (2 Cor. 8,9)

Christmas is a time to make choices. Choose Christ.

-Fr. Gerry Condon

Ione United Church of Christ

'Child in the Hay - A Song for Christmas'

So much has been spoken, read and sung about Christmas that one sometimes wonders what is left to say. As I pondered over this, I thought perhaps it would be appropriate to write down the following words as a special Christmas commentary. These are song lyrics for a carol that my husband, Hasa, composed some 14 years ago for a church in North Dakota. The music was his; we both wrote the words.

Stable, stable of light,
O what glory came from you one night.
Child, child in the hay,
You brought the spirit and the love
To take our hurts away.

You talked on the mountain,
You walked on the sea,
And at every village fountain
You set the captives free.

You healed the sick and lame,
And made the blind man see,
O little babe of Bethlehem,
O man of Galilee.

Child, child in the hay,
You came to teach that God is Love,
And show each one the way.
You led us from the shadows,
Your lantern pierced the night
Dissolving shame and guilt and fear
In brightly dazzling light.

Once again you come to us
Reborn in manger cold,
To warm our frozen hearts anew,
A babe so fresh and bold.

So vulnerable and tiny,
A special star your sign,
And yet such power lies within
To weave out God's design,
That all the people everywhere
Should live in harmony,
And walk in ways of peace and joy,
As life was meant to be.

Stable, stable of light,
O what glory came from you one night,
Child, child in the hay,

You brought the spirit and the love
To take our hurts away.

-Isa Brown, pastor

Heppner United Methodist Church

Maybe It's Beyond Logic

Can Christmas appeal to one's logic? Christmas seems to be simply an orgy of buying stuff. But consider this: The basis for this tremendous burst of buying stuff and gift giving and parties and near hysteria, is a quiet event that Christians believe actually happened a long time ago. You can say that in all societies there has always been a midwinter festival, and that many of the trappings of our Christmas are almost violently pagan, but you come back to the eternal fact of the day, ... the birth of God on earth.

It seems to leave you only three ways of accepting Christmas. One is cynically, as a time to make money or endorse the making of it. Another way is graciously, the appropriate attitude for non-Christians, who wish their fellow citizens all the joys their beliefs entitle them. And the third way, of course, is reverently. If this is the anniversary of the appearance of the Lord of the universe in the form of a helpless babe ... it is a very important day. It's a startling idea of course, the whole story that a virgin was selected by God to bear God's Son as a way of showing God's love and concern for humankind. It's my guess that, in spite of all the lip service given to it, it is not an idea that has been popular with the modern, logical human mind set.

It's a somewhat illogical idea, and modern, logical persons like logic almost as much as they like buying stuff. It's so revolutionary an idea that it probably could only have come from a God that is beyond logic. It has a magnificent appeal. Almost

nobody has seen God, and almost nobody has any real idea of what God is like, and the truth is that among men the idea of seeing God suddenly, and standing in a very bright light, is not necessarily a completely comforting and appealing idea. But everyone has seen babies, and most people like them. If God wanted to be loved as well as feared, God moved correctly here, for a baby growing up learns all about people. If God wanted to be intimately a part of humankind, God moved correctly, for the experience of birth and family-hood is our most intimate and precious experience.

So it comes beyond logic. It is either a falsehood or it is the truest thing in the world. It's the story of the great innocence of God the baby. God in the person of humankind has such a dramatic shock toward the heart, that, if it is not true, for Christians, nothing is true.

So, if a Christian is touched only once a year, the touching is still worth it. And maybe on some given Christmas, some final quiet morning, the touch will take.

Maybe this Christmas will take on someone like you. Maybe you won't have a perfect Christmas. Maybe it will be far better than that. Maybe you will see right to the heart of this sacred event to the God who seeks not perfect Christmases, but love. Amen?

-The Rev. Al Trachsel

Heppner First Christian Church

'Behold, I Bring You Good News of Great Joy'

My son and I were talking one day about Christmas. Like a typical parent of a five year old, I have continued to spread the myths of Christmas, not thinking about what really happened. He was asking me if Santa had fireproof clothing to come down the chimney.

I said, "Santa doesn't always come down the chimney. He could come through the front door."

My son then asked, "Does Santa really have flying reindeer and a sleigh?" I said, "I'm sure he does."

His comment was, "That sure would be cool!" That's the neat thing about myths. They are cool and no one ever suffers from hearing them or believing them, but they are not true. Not only are they not true, they can't help you out of a problem.

On the other hand there are truths about Christmas that can be of great help. Here is one truth. The truth about Christmas is that God sent his Son to earth to live as a man and to die for our sins on a wooden cross. Jesus, that little baby, grew up to become the Savior of the whole world. More specifically, He died for your sins or mistakes.

The point is this, where as myths sure are cool and make us feel good, truths have the power to change our lives. Jesus paid for your mistakes. This allows God to forgive you for the mistakes you make. The result: A better life lived for God since the guilt over the mistakes does not pull you back into sin because you have been forgiven. All because of one truth about Christmas. There are many more truths that God wants to share with you and me if only we would stop and look at what He has to offer. Each one has the power to help you in your daily life, in your relationships with others, in your hopes, and in your dreams. If only you would. My son thinks flying reindeer are cool. But you know upon reflection, I think the truths about Christmas sure beat the myths and they are way cool!

Our services are 9:45 a.m. for Bible school and 11 a.m. for our worship service. The community is always welcome. And remember, smile, God Loves You!

-Andrew Johnson,

Minister

Heppner Church of the Nazarene

My 'Nice Guy' Christmas

I was in a hurry, driving into the mall's parking lot, hardly looking to right and left. "Slow down" - my brain instructed. How many errands were buzzing in my tired head. Somewhere in my peripheral vision there was a young girl pushing a load of shopping carts toward the grocery store. There must have been 20 to 30 of those huge metal carriers locked into one another.

I had space enough. There was no danger. I could swing around that slow moving train of silver carts. So it was that I meandered my car to the right of those carriages, spying an empty space near the drug store where I could park, dash in for a quick purchase, then dash back out.

As I flung open the car door, I looked up to see that young girl. She was peering straight at me with a hurt look on her face. How could she have got to that part of the parking lot so quickly after having pushed all those heavy carts. "When are you going to learn to drive with sense?" she called out to me. With a sad downward glance, she turned around, having accomplished what her sense of justice had prodded. Before I realized what had happened, she had disappeared among all the cars. I went into the drug store, bought my trinket and felt troubled way down deep inside. All of a sudden the Christmas cheer had disappeared from my heart. No amount of painted reindeer on poles outside could erase the picture of that girl's look.

"What have I done?" I asked my inner wilted self. What I had done was to drive thoughtlessly, carelessly. I had also brought pain to a young person at the most holy season of the year. It simply was not right. But what could I do about it? She was gone, meshed in with the hubbub outside. She'd soon be forgotten.

However, when I returned to my car, there she was. She was gathering another heap of carriages, tugging to get them in line for another trip back to the store. I saw her face again. It was not happy. She was cold, tired and wanting to go home after a long day. And then I had added hurt to it all.

I lifted the door latch to get inside where it was warm. But I couldn't lift my legs into the car. I had to shut the door and walk over to that girl's side. As I approached her, I thought that she might become scared. So I put out my hand toward hers, starting to talk even before I was that close to her.

"I am so sorry," I started. "I want you to know that I am really sorry. I want to apologize to you for what I had done. You see, I was driving and not thinking what I was doing. I saw you but I did not see you. I saw those carriages you were pushing but I guess it just did not register all that precisely in my head what was going on. Have you ever had that happen to you?"

She looked up at me, wondering if I was truly sincere? "You see, I am really a nice guy. I don't enjoy being rude to people. But I was impolite to you today. I hurt you. And that hurt me. So I just want you to know that, I did not mean what I did. And I ask for your forgiveness."

She broke into the broadest smile, then reached out her hand to shake mine. Relieved to know that I was not going to add insult to injury, "Yes, I do know what you are talking about. I have had

days like that, too," she laughed in reply. "You know you really are a nice guy. Thanks a lot. Thanks. Thanks an awful lot."

I returned to the car, climbed inside and drove away. As I passed by her and the carriages, she lifted a hand to wave good-bye. I waved back, glad that I had retrieved the nice guy inside. In doing that, I had made two people happy. I had also brought back the cheer of reindeer painted on poles all around me. It was that good feeling that comes, especially at Christmas time.

"...on earth peace, goodwill toward men." (Luke 2:14)
-J. Grant Swank, pastor, Church of the Nazarene, Windham, ME, submitted by Pastor Duane Jones

Christian Life Center

'Jesus the Savior'

Matthew 1:21 "Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins."

Christmas is the time we celebrate the virgin birth of Jesus the Christ. And there is a reason why this event has been commemorated for almost 2,000 years. The Incarnation has the greatest significance for all who have placed their faith in Christ because it affects their eternal destinies.

The Bible tells us an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him that Mary's Child was conceived of the Holy Ghost. And then the angel told Joseph that the name of the Son to be born should be Jesus. Thus, it was not Mary or Joseph who chose the name, but God himself.

The message of Christmas then is good news. For people who are struggling with the tyranny of sin, there are "good tidings of great joy" Luke 2:10. It means there is salvation for all who will receive it. And, if you have not yet accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior you can have the happiest Christmas you have ever had by asking Him to be your Savior right now.

People who long for inner peace with God know they need to be saved, but they don't always understand what salvation involves. You may be asking, "What does salvation mean? What does it mean to be saved?"

Salvation first of all means to be saved from the ultimate punishment for sin. The bible says that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" Ezekiel 18:20.

Second of all, we are saved from the domination of sin. People bound by sin often long to be free. Sinful habits remind them over and over again that they are slaves. They are so dominated by sin that their health is ruined. Relationships in the home and elsewhere are disastrous. Hope for any kind of respectable living is shattered. They know of a better way of life but cannot live it.

If you find yourself in this condition, the message of Christmas is a message of hope for you. If you will turn your life over to Jesus Christ He will save you from the domination of sin. This is why He came into the world.

Third, we are saved from the very presence of sin. At this Christmas season we are aware of the fact that the world is not the Garden of Eden God intended it to be. While there are happy people in the world, suffering and tragedy seem to dominate. The curse of sin has made a dreadful impact. The whole realm of nature bears witness to this fact. And, it is the human race in rebellion against God which has brought about conditions which result in misery and tragedy.

The Son of God was named Jesus because He would save His people from their sins. He is the only Savior. He is the only one who can help you. But He will help you if you will ask Him. Won't you ask Jesus Christ to forgive you for your sins right now? Merry Christmas!

-Tim Van Cleave, pastor

Hope and Valby Lutheran Parish

'Take Time to Reflect on the Advent'

I am a newcomer to South Morrow County. My oldest son and I arrived in Heppner on Halloween Day, and my new job, as pastor of Valby and Hope Lutheran Churches, began the next day. As many of us know, moving is a "good news, bad news" kind of experience. The hard work of moving a household is ideally offset by the excitement, expectation and hope that comes with a new home and new jobs. But when we first arrive in a new place, the

stress and turmoil seem to dominate the scene and overwhelm us -- the requirements of new jobs, new working relationships, new people to meet, getting used to new neighbors and leaving old friends -- the list goes on and on. Unfortunately, it is often times hard to see the "good news" side of the equation in the midst of everything that is going on.

The Advent Season, the preparation time for Christmas can be like that.

There is so much going on, so much to do, so much that we want to do, that we become overwhelmed and depressed if everything doesn't work out "just perfectly." Our preparations and expectations for the holidays dominate our thoughts to such a degree that the "good news" is obscured and lost.

We live in a time when even normal, everyday life has a pace of incredible swiftness. One of the curses of our modern world is that we are losing the ability, or have forgotten how, to pause, to reflect, to consider, to think about what is really important to us. I sometimes feel like I am engaged in a daily race without any thought to the outcome. When that happens to us, we need to make sure we take the time each day to pause and reflect on the "good news" of Christmas - the gift of salvation that God has given us in the child at Bethlehem. Daily reading and reflection in God's Word will give you the opportunity to allow God's peace and promise to enter your heart and your life. Take some time each day to spend in Advent reflection, listening to the Word of God, pondering each thought. I am sure you will be rewarded with renewed strength and faith this Advent Season.

Above all, Advent is a season of hope, of anticipating the birth of the Savior. Our world is all too often a place where people live desperate, despairing lives without hope. The holiday season is not always a time when it is easy for people to be joyous. Many people have financial problems and family difficulties that are only made worse during the holidays. This is precisely why Jesus came into the world, to bring hope for new life and salvation from our sins and desperate situations.

In the 10th chapter of the Gospel of John, the purpose for God's incarnation becoming man in Jesus - is beautifully described as that of the Good Shepherd. "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10: 10) This is hope for living that is a gift of grace to us through the Christ Child. May God bless you this Holiday Season, and in the days and years ahead, with a renewed faith in His promise of new and abundant life.

Merry Christmas to you all.

-Pastor Dick Metz

All Saints' Episcopal

'Carpe Diem'

My Dear Friends,

I love to travel, and air-travel normally doesn't bother me - except for take-offs and landings. One day, ... As the airplane neared the runway, I looked down through the wind and the

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