

## The True Meaning of Christmas: inspirational messages from local pastors

### God is with us in good times and bad

A recent letter I received discussed three Old Testament people (they lived around 800-1,000 years before Jesus was born) whose lives were highlighted by encounters and victories against overwhelming odds.

David, as a young man, came face to face on the field of battle with the giant Philistine warrior, Goliath. And David prevailed using only a stone and his shepherd's sling to fell the mighty warrior. And David's cry before he went into combat? "This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands." (1 Samuel 17:46) And Goliath fell.

Jehosaphat, King of Judah, was surrounded by fierce armies. Vastly outnumbered, the king turned to the Lord and heard this prophesy: "Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's." (2 Chronicles 20:15.) And the enemy of Judah was routed, and King Jehosaphat won a great victory.

King Hezekiah found himself under siege by an Assyrian army. Confronted with potential disaster, he used these words to encourage his workers as they fortified Jerusalem: "Assyrian King Sennacherib is only an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles." (2 Chronicles 32:8.) And Hezekiah prevailed.

When we read stories such as these it is easy to get the idea that if you are in trouble or want a certain outcome in one of life's "situations", all you have to do is believe in God and everything comes out great. In fact, I have heard televangelists bringing that message in their broadcasts: Do you want financial success and security? Go to God. Do you want a life of ease where you don't face problems and disappointments like everyone else? Become a Christian and see everything "come up roses."

But it seems to me reality is very different. Life is exactly as we read in the Gospel of Matthew: "For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous." (5:44) Bad things happen to good people and vice versa. So what is the point?

The point is you don't have to be a great leader like David or a king like Jehosaphat or Hezekiah to have God's gift of presence and help in your life. The answer is found in the angel's announcement to the shepherds of Bethlehem on Christmas Day (shepherds were on the bottom of the totem pole in their society). The first words the angel spoke were to these lowly shepherds: "Do not be afraid; for see -- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." (Luke 2:10b-11.)

The angel announced the coming of "Emmanuel - God with us." Life is filled with challenges and difficulties, and they come to all of us - Christian or not. But the angel's pronouncement is of a Savior who comes to us when we are exhausted, frustrated, facing seemingly insurmountable difficulties, and says "Do not be afraid", I am with you.

That is what the Christmas message is all about at its core. A God who loved each and every person in the world so much, that he came into the world to bring us peace and strength, forgiveness and confidence for our daily lives.

In the 10th chapter of the Gospel of John, the purpose for God's incarnation - becoming man in Jesus - is beautifully described. "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.

Merry Christmas to you all.

-The Rev. R.G. "Dick" Metz,  
Pastor, Hope and Valby Lutheran  
Parish

### A savior for all times

The chosen people had hope. Their hope was for a redeemer. Almighty God had promised that he would send a redeemer. They never forgot that. So when God sent them prophets and kings the people knew that they were messengers of God. The prophets often brought them messages of hope. The kings were God's ambassadors on earth. When Moses led them out of slavery, and when David was victorious, they knew that the power of God was at work. Since the kings and prophets were anointed, the people considered them as chosen by God, and a sign of God's presence with them.

However, their expectation of the Messiah was colored by their own wishful thinking. They wanted and expected a powerful Messiah but not a divine one. They expected a Messiah who would be an instrument of God's power, but they did not expect a Messiah who was God incarnate. It was only after the resurrection of Jesus that his contemporaries came to recognize his divinity. Jesus even had to explain to two of his disciples as they made their way to Emmaus how the words of the prophets were fulfilled in him.

St. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, makes it clear that Jesus was the Son of God when he states: "...but established as Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness through resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord." Rom. 1:4. St. Matthew also indicated the divinity of Christ when he tells of the angel speaking to Joseph: "For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus." Matt. 1:20.

In our world today there are those who struggle with their concept of the Messiah. They, too, would like to see a powerful leader rather than a tiny baby. Yet that baby grew into the most powerful spiritual leader of all time. He did not come to conquer but to convert; he did not come to rule but to serve; he did not come to oppress but to free. So, for those who wish to find inner happiness even in this world, he is there waiting for them. He will be as precious a gift to them as he was to the shepherds, and as he was to the Magi. Come to him as we celebrate his birth. He may be waiting just for you.

-Fr. Gerry Condon  
St. Patrick's and St. William's  
Catholic churches

# PEACE ON EARTH GOOD WILL TO ALL MANKIND

### The greatest Christmas gift

On July 29, 1969, astronaut Neil Armstrong climbed down an aluminum ladder and put his feet on the surface of the moon. In an address to the nation President Richard Nixon said, "The greatest event in human history occurred when man first put his foot on the moon."

I disagree with that statement. I believe the greatest event in human history was when God put His foot on the earth. He stepped out of heaven through the womb of a Jewish virgin. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. His name was Jesus.

Once again it is Christmas time. We realize this is the occasion when the Son of God became the Son of Man, and the God of Genesis became the Babe of Bethlehem.

What does Christmas mean to you? Family gatherings, decorated trees, bright colorful lights, giving and receiving gifts, wonderful food, beautiful holiday music, Santa Claus, fruitcake, eggnog, cards and friends? We each have our own special memories of Christmas. I hope your Christmas takes in the true reason for the season.

Imagine if you will, what enormous joy God the Father must have felt as he gave to the world, the greatest gift ever given, His Son, Jesus. Imagine Him looking down on the scene at the stable, with a huge smile on His face, wondering who, if anyone, had any idea of the importance of this child, this gift. Think about all those who were present at the time, the shepherds, the innkeeper, the wisemen, and the townsfolk. Who knew the meaning of this gift? How was the gift received? How would you have received the gift had you been there?

As you give and receive gifts this Christmas, remember the first Christmas gift ever given. Remember that the Christ Child was given to all mankind. May you experience the gift of Jesus Christ this Christmas by accepting him into your life. Don't allow another Christmas to go by, without Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Have a very Merry Christmas and New Year.

-Pastor Tim Van Cleave  
Christian Life Center

### Jesus sent to be in our hearts

Dear Friends,

A cartoon from a few years ago showed a woman saying to her husband, "Good grief, Henry. Here's Christmas at our throats again!"

Amid the preparations for Christmas each year, there always seem to be a few voices like hers, proclaiming a "Bah, humbug!" on the whole business. And if the truth be known, some of us may feel less than excited about Christmas ourselves. The expense, the crowds, the overindulgence, the hurried schedules and all the other trappings of modern Christmas celebrations are enough to make all of us take a jaundiced look at the season.

In the face of the humbug state of affairs, it is helpful to remember that God did not send Jesus to be "at our throats," but to be "in our hearts." The difference between those two concepts defines the gap between gloom and glory. There's a reason we call the gospel good news. As John so aptly put it, "For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (3:17).

Jesus is God's gift to our world -- and to our hearts. When Jesus resides within, whether we enjoy or merely tolerate the flurry of seasonal preparations, Christmas itself is a grand opportunity to say thank you to God for the gift of the Son. Please join us as we seek to celebrate Christmas in our hearts. In God's peace,

-Pastor Andrew Johnson  
First Christian Church

## Area churches plan Christmas services

### Christmas Church Services

#### First Christian Church

The Christmas Eve candlelight service will be held Thursday, Dec. 24, beginning at 7 p.m. Everyone is invited to attend.

#### Hope Lutheran Church

The Christmas Eve candlelight worship with Holy Communion will be held Thursday, Dec. 24, at 6 p.m.

#### Valby Lutheran Church

The Christmas Eve candlelight worship with Holy Communion is planned for Thursday, Dec. 24, at 9 p.m.

#### St. Patrick's Church

The Christmas Eve Mass at St. Patrick's Church in Heppner, Thursday, Dec. 24, will begin with a procession of lights at 9 p.m. with the blessing of the nativity scene and the Vigil Mass.

Friday, December 25, the Christmas Mass with the singing of Christmas carols will begin at 11 a.m.

#### St. William's Church

Christmas Mass with the singing of Christmas carols will be held at St. William's Church in Ione beginning at 8:45 a.m. Christmas day, Friday, December 25. Everyone is invited to attend.

#### All Saints Episcopal Church

A Christmas Eve service will be held at All Saints Episcopal Church Dec. 24 at 8 p.m.

Holy Eucharist will be presided over by the Rt. Rev. Rustin Kimsey, bishop of the Diocese of Eastern Oregon.

"We welcome everyone to be with us on this special evening," said a church spokesperson.

### Births

Lisandro Vera Chairez-a son Lisandro Vera was born to Maria and Camilo Vera of Irrigon on December 9, 1998 at Good Shepherd Community Hospital in Hermiston. The baby weighed 7 lbs. 1 oz.

### How well do you know the Christmas story?

"Jesus is the Reason for the Season." Most people have seen this statement before. Sadly, though, many people do not know, or do not remember, the details and origin of the first Christmas. The following quiz will help one learn or recall many events of the biblical story about the birth of Jesus:

1) As long as Christmas has been celebrated, it has been on December 25 (true or false).

2) Joseph was from: A-Bethlehem; B-Jerusalem; C-Nazareth; D-Egypt; E-Minnesota; F-None of the above.

3) How did Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem? A-Camel; B-Donkey; C-Joseph walked, Mary rode a donkey; D-Taxi; E-Who knows?

4) Mary and Joseph were married when Mary became pregnant (true or false).

5) Mary and Joseph were married when Jesus was born (true or false).

6) Mary was a virgin when she delivered Jesus (true or false).

7) What did the innkeeper tell Mary and Joseph? A-"There is no room for you in this inn;" B-"I have a stable you can use;" C-"Come back after the Christmas rush and I should have some vacancies;" D-Both A and B; E-None of the above.

8) A "manger" is a: A-Stable for domestic animals; B-Wooden hay storage bin; C-Feeding trough; D-barn.

9) Which animals does the Bible say were present at Jesus' birth? A-Cows, sheep, goats; B-Cows, donkeys, sheep; C-Sheep and goats only; D-Miscellaneous barnyard animals; E-unknown.

10) Who saw the "star in the East"? A-Shepherds; B-Mary and Joseph; C-Three kings; D-Both A and C; E-None of the above.

11) How many angels spoke to the shepherds? A-One; B-Three; C-A "multitude"; D-None of the above.

12) What "sign" did the angels tell the shepherds to look for? A-"This way to baby Jesus;" B-A star over Bethlehem; C-A baby that doesn't cry; D-A house with a Christmas tree; E-A baby in a stable; F-None of the above.

13) What did the angels sing? A-"Joy to the World, the Lord is Come;" B-"Alleluia;" C-"Unto us a child is born, unto us a child is given;" D-"Glory to God in the Highest;" E-"Glory to the newborn King;" F-"My Sweet Lord."

14) What is "frankincense"? A-A precious metal; B-A precious fabric; C-A precious perfume; D-An Eastern monster story; E-None of the above.

15) What is "myrrh"? A-An easily shaped metal; B-A spice used for burying people; C-A drink; D-After-shave lotion; E-None of the above.

16) The wise men found Jesus in a: A-Manger; B-Stable; C-House; D-Holiday Inn; E-Good mood.

17) Why did the wise men stop in Jerusalem? A-To inform Herod about Jesus; B-To find out where Jesus was; C-To ask about the star they saw; D-To buy gas; E-To buy presents for Jesus.

18) Who told Mary and Joseph to go to Bethlehem? A-The angel; B-Mary's mother; C-Herod; D-Caesar Augustus; E-Alexander the Great.

19) Where do we find the Christmas story in order to check up on all these questions? A-Matthew; B-Mark; C-Luke; D-John; E-All of the above; F-Only A and C; G-Only B and D.

20) I think that this quiz was: A-Super; B-Great; C-Fantastic; D-All of the above.

Answers: 1) False. (Not until the fourth century did it settle on the 25th.) 2) A. (See Luke 2:3-4.) 3) E. (The Bible doesn't say.) 4) False. (See Matthew 1:18.) 5) False. (See Luke 2:5.) 6) True. (See Matthew 1:25.) 7) False. (There was no word on the innkeeper. See Luke 2:7.) 8) C. 9) E. (The Bible doesn't specify.) 10) E. (The wise men did (they were not kings).) See Matthew 2:2.) 11) A. (See Luke 2:9.) 12) F. (See Luke 2:12.) 13) D. (See Luke 2:14.) 14) C. (See Exodus 30:34.) 15) B. (See John 19:39.)

16) C. (See Matthew 2:11.) 17) B. (See Matthew 2:1-12.) 18) D. (See Luke 2:1,4.) 19) G. 20) D, of course.

-Pastor Duane Jones  
Church of the Nazarene

### Ione Site Council meets

The Ione Site Council met on Dec. 9 for their monthly meeting. Steve Schaber reported that he had talked with Barbara Stefani-Peterson about the middle school student government taking over Positive School Action Committee activities. She indicated that they would take over those duties.

The high school girls' volleyball team was recognized for their league, district and state championship victories. Also, Jessica Krebs was honored for earning a trip to 4-H Congress in Atlanta, GA for leadership.

Becky Hunt passed out copies of the criteria for the President's Award for Educational Excellence for students in elementary, middle and high school. Students meeting criteria can receive a signed award from the President of the United States. The council was in favor of the program. Hunt will give the information to principal Dick Allen and will report further at the next meeting.

Dale Holland reported that the Honor Society would like to give out academic letters twice a year, in the fall for the previous spring and again in the spring for letters earned in the fall.

Schaber asked that the council approve a request from Allen to apply for a grant for the Oregon Dept. of Education. The grant is based on state math assessment scores and, if successful, each teacher could receive \$1,000 to be used in the classroom. The council approved the request.

The next meeting of the site council will be held on Wednesday, Jan. 13, beginning at 5 p.m. in room one of the Ione High School.

### St. Patrick's Senior Center Bulletin Board

Eighty-five people were present for the senior Christmas dinner Dec. 16. Members of the Christian Missionary Fellowship Church served. A large group of home schooled children from Heppner, Lexington Ione sang Christmas carols in the sitting room and the dining room. They were accompanied on the piano by Myrna VanCleave. The Seniors really appreciate their beautiful voices and smiling faces.

The menu for December 30 will be sweet and sour chicken, chow mien noodles, fried rice, oriental vegetables, apricots and carrot cake with frosting. Members of the Episcopal Church will serve.

Exercise class was held Tuesday and Thursday. Pinochle was played Tuesday and Friday afternoon and Bingo played Friday evening. Bingo was preceded by a Christmas buffet.

Irene Anhorn fell Wednesday, breaking her hip. She had surgery in Hermiston and is now at the hospital here in Heppner. Merry Christmas, everyone.

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