

Peace On Earth, Good Will To All Mankind

The True Meaning Of Christmas: Inspiration Messages From Local Pastors

**Hope & Valby Lutheran Parish
All Saints' Episcopal Church**
"Addicted to the New,
We Need the Hope of the Old Story"

I shared the following editorial column with members of my congregations in our December newsletter. I think its message bears repeating, along with some added thoughts of its meaning for us at Christmas.

In November, staff writer Jay Bookman of the Atlanta Journal Constitution, wrote a column entitled "If It's New, and Shallow, People Love It." In it he addressed our culture's addiction to "the new". Bookman writes: "We are enamored of the new, fascinated by the new, addicted to the new. We need new, more new, and we need it now Affluent consumers already own one or two of everything conceivable; so they don't need stuff, they need new stuff." And the velocity of new -- the time it takes for new to become old -- is accelerating. Like any addict, we have to consume more and more "new" to get our high. And we're running out. Our kids are tapped out, our artists are desperate and the past is all but wrung dry . . . "New" is what makes the world possible; it is the coin of the realm, the currency of our superficial conversation."

In a sermon a few weeks ago, I related a conversation Billy Graham had with a very wealthy and successful businessman who was the envy of all his friends and associates. Dr. Graham said that in the course of their conversation the man just broke down and cried. He told Billy that in spite of all the comforts, wealth and success he enjoyed, there was a deep emptiness in his soul.

The Christmas story that we hear each year is a 2,000 year old story -- hardly a "new thing". It is old and familiar to many of us. Yet when we trust that God has acted in this "old story", it brings us a newness of life each and everyday. As Paul writes in his letter to the Romans: 24, For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? 25 But of we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Romans 8:24-25 NRSV)

This century has been one of unprecedented "new" in the history of humankind. More advances have been made - across the board in science, medicine and the social sciences - than in any other 100 years in the history of the world. And yet, in some very significant ways, the world in which we live is not that much different from the world when Jesus was born. We still endure famine, floods and earthquakes; genocide continues to occur in this "civilized world"; political instability and wars have torn apart whole continents.

And our basic human longings and desires have not really changed all that much either. We too seek peace, love, security and a sense of purpose for our lives. But I have found it true that the only way the human heart can experience true love, contentment and peace is through a relationship with God. Like that businessman Rev. Graham was talking with, when we seek our fulfillment in the things of this world, sooner or later we discover how fleeting and empty that satisfaction is.

Jesus came that we might know and experience the fullness of God's grace and love. He is the One God sent to reveal God's self to the world.

For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus; himself human, 6 who gave himself a ransom for all -- this was attested at the right time. (1 Timothy 2:5-6 NRSV)

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is always, and foremost, a Word of Hope -- and so it is "abundantly new". It is about what gives value and meaning to daily life - both in good times and in bad. That man talking to Rev. Graham knew that something was missing in his life, even though he had access to all the new stuff anyone could conceivably want. That "something" was not new at all, in our modern day sense. It is as old as the story of the Child in Bethlehem, but it is "new" as the gift of hope and newness of life that comes to us each and every day through simple faith in Jesus Christ.

This is hope for living that is a gift of grace to us through the Christ Child. May God richly bless you this holiday season with His "new" presence with you, each and every day of your life.

Merry Christmas to you all.

-The Reverend R. G. "Dick" Metz, Pastor

Heppner Christian Missionary Fellowship

"Christmas Lights"

Christmas is beautiful,
With so many decorations,
Celebrated for centuries,
Across the world, by many nations.

Bells, tinsel, and bows,
But my favorite are Christmas lights,
Which shine brightly for all to see,
On dark winter nights.

The Light of the world,
Is Who they represent to me,
The One Who made deaf ears hear,
And blind eyes to see.

He brought hope for the lost,
And rest for the weary,
Today, His light shining in us,
Can make a dark world, less dreary.

So let Him shine through,
To lead other people to the Way,
Not just at the time we call, "Christmas";
But each and every day!

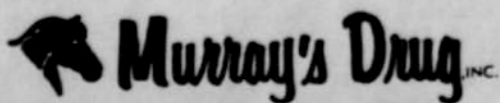
"Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the Light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of life." (John 8:12 KJV)

-Pastor Linda Crane

Wedding Tables

Katie Kenny & Bret Elithorp

Wedding: January 8th • Shower: December 28th



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**St. Patrick's Church
St. William's Church**

"Carry His Standard into the New Millennium"

As we approach the new millennium we are hearing about the many significant events in the past year, and in the past century. Some of them are astounding - man landing on the moon, the first explosion of the atom bomb, fantastic progress in aviation, in medicine, in communications, in fact, an explosion of technology. Then there are the predictions of the future. We hear that mankind will have better health and live longer and technology will continue to expand. Those who try to forecast the future do not seem to be making any predictions that mankind will be spiritually better in the new millennium. That thought should cause all of us to take a new look at the meaning of Christmas, the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ.

In the past 2000 years the most significant event has unquestionably been the birth of Jesus. The author of "One Solitary Life" expressed that every effectively. He had no armies, no navies, no atom bombs, yet he inspired millions through the centuries. There have been those who gave up fame and fortune to follow him. There have been those who have taken up his cause even when it meant the supreme sacrifice of life itself. There have been those who have been inspired to "give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to see for rest, to labor and not to seek reward, save that of knowing the they do his will."

If we only celebrate Christmas with colored lights, gifts, and turkey, we are missing the purpose of his coming. His birth is a call to action for he says: "Come follow me." When the apostles followed him they listened to his teachings, they witnessed his miracles. Then when he died and rose from the dead, he commissioned them to go into the world and to teach everything that he had taught them. They did just that being even ready to die for his cause.

As we celebrate the two thousandth anniversary of his birth we must do so with hope and vision for the future. It is up to each of those who are his true followers to carry his standard into the new millennium, and his standard is the cross. Let each of us go forth dedicated to his Church, fortified with his principles, and committed to his person. By so doing we will hold up the torch of spiritual enlightenment, and take our place in the onward march of Christianity to make our world a place of spiritual joy and happiness.

-Fr. Gerry Condon

Heppner Church of the Nazarene

"A Call to Repentance"

There is an old road that goes into Dent Acres, near Orofino, Idaho. Before slack water filled the canyon this road was not much better than a goat trail. It was very windy, full of potholes and washouts. No guardrails existed and the canyon walls of the North Fork of the Clearwater River were very steep. Traveling this road required a four-wheel drive vehicle. And, as I recall, it took better than four hours to travel between Orofino and Elk River, at best.

Then in the late 60's Dworshak Dam was built. Dent Acres was to become a popular recreational campground. During the early years of the 70s the road was slightly improved, until you reached the North Fork of the Clearwater River. There you will find a most unusual sight. A large bridge, and no ordinary bridge at that. A quarter mile long, very modern suspension bridge. One hundred feet below the roadway is the cold blue water with 600 feet of water below that.

Today you will find that road to Dent Acres is improved. No potholes, two-lane paved modern highway with guardrails, road signs, even snow-plowed in the winter. It is now very pleasant travel by automobile through near-wilderness country.

In ancient times when a king was traveling and was expected to pass through your community all the major roads were repaired. Potholes were filled in, rough spots smoothed out. When the king arrived his chariot would roll smoothly over the roads. The roads were made comfortable for the king's journey. Keep this picture in mind as you read Luke 3:2-6: "...The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: [40:3-5]. "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God's salvation.'" (NIV)

John was preaching a message, "a call to repentance"; that there is One coming from God who would bring salvation to His people. Therefore the people were to prepare the way for His coming. People were to turn from their sin and evil and prepare their hearts to receive their King.

John's quotes from Isaiah described the building or repairing of a new highway. Just as a village or community prepared for the arrival of their King, believers in Christ are to prepare as well. We are to prepare for the arrival of our King, King Jesus. We are to prepare the roads of our lives, in what we believe, in what we say, how we say it, and how we live it.

To do this, first, we must make "the way" for the Lord. That is, clean out the filth and garbage from our lives. Understand, we can not clean out all the junk from our lives entirely on our own. For a through cleaning we need help from God. The most important thing we can do is: to change our attitude to allow Christ's indwelling influence into our hearts.

Second we are to "... Make straight paths for Him." We do that by admitting what our known stumbling blocks are, then stop using them as excuses to justify our ill behavior. When we repent of our sins with a sincere heart this allows for a "straight path" for Christ the King to approach us.

Look at the invitational Hymn -- "O little town of Bethlehem." Verse 4; it has powerful words to help us. "O Holy Child of Bethlehem, descend on us, we pray. Cast out our sin, and enter in: be born in us today." What a lovely invitation for Jesus to fill our hearts with Joy and Peace this Christmas. Open your heart and mind to receive Him. Jesus will not force His way into your life. That is why we must, "... Make straight paths for Him." In doing this you are openly inviting Him into your heart. There He will minister to you, giving you comfort and freedom of fear. After all He is the Prince of Peace.

All who come humbly before Christ are welcome. Philippians 2:9-11 reads: "Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth; and every tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Merry Christmas.

-The Rev. Duane Jones
(Background Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-11)

Ione United Church of Christ
"Recognize the Promise God Has for Us"

Mary was troubled when the angel greeted her, and wondered what sort of greeting it might be. The angel told her not to be afraid, because she was special to God. The angel explained what would happen through her, and why. Mary still wondered how it could happen. The angel explained this also, and told her about Elizabeth, who had also seen an angel and was in the sixth month of another special pregnancy. Mary accepted her role and her task.

Mary hurried to visit Elizabeth, who lived several days travel away. Elizabeth quickly recognized Mary's situation, even before Mary could tell her. Elizabeth blessed Mary, and rejoiced with her. Only then was Mary able to overflow with her own song of blessings, and to declare what the birth of her child would mean for the world.

"God has shown strength with his arm," she sang. "God has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree. God has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away!"

Months later, she gave birth to Jesus. For the rest of her life, Mary served God in the way that she had accepted when the angel spoke to her.

Once in a while, people still have experiences in which we learn about the power of God, the purpose of our own lives, and the possibilities that are set before us. Like Mary, we may be scared and troubled by these moments, and wonder what sort of greetings they might be. We might begin to understand what we are to do, but not be so sure of how it can be done. We may accept the role and task that is set before us, whether or not we see the promise that God has for us.

We can do for each other what Elizabeth did for Mary, recognizing what God is doing in our lives and helping each other to understand. One person may offer another a few words of interpretation and encouragement, so that the other may be set free to praise God and witness to what God is doing in his or her life, and in the world.

May the Spirit of God touch your heart this Christmas. May there be an Elizabeth to recognize what is growing in you, and offer you blessings that will set you free to praise and serve.

-The Rev. Paul Clay.

First Christian Church

"Behold, I Bring You Good News Of Great Joy..."

I wrote this letter a couple of years ago but I think it is still so true. 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 fire-proof 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."

-Andrew Johnson, Minister

Willow Creek Baptist Church

"A Christmas Celebration"

Christmas has always been a special time of year for me. I look back with fond memories to the times our family spent together cutting the tree, putting up lights, traveling to Grandma's house, and enjoying Christmas dinner. I remember on Christmas morning, after the presents had been exchanged, Dad would read the Christmas story from the Bible and explain that the best gift of all is Jesus.

As I grew older I began to be more inquisitive about Jesus. Who is He? Why was He born? These questions led to answers that now shape how I celebrate Christmas. When I think about the baby Jesus and celebrate His birth at Christmas I am convinced of two things about Him.

First, I am convinced that Jesus is our only hope. He came to restore a right relationship between God and people. There is nothing I can do to earn God's love and I cannot work my way to heaven. The Bible teaches that God gives eternal life to all those who put their hope and trust in Jesus.

Second, I am convinced that He is the King. The writer of Hebrews (1:8) talks about Jesus when he quotes Psalm 45:6-7. "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom." The hymn in Philippians 2: 9-11 emphasizes that Jesus has been given a "name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." I can live with confidence because Jesus the King is in control even when things seem out of control. When I allow Jesus to be King of my life He fills it with eternal purpose and meaning. When Jesus is King He teaches me to take the focus off myself and helps me love others the same way He loves me.

So when I see a nativity scene during the Christmas holidays, I am reminded that Jesus is not an ordinary baby. He is my Hope and He is my King. Now that is something to celebrate.

-Brent Waldrep, Pastor

Dr. Wenberg to open practice

Kenneth Wenberg, M.D., has announced that he is now in private practice and will be making house calls until he

establishes an office in Heppner. Dr. Wenberg will see patients in their homes for medical consultation. Patients may call 989-8403 for an appointment.