

Peace On Earth, Good Will To All Mankind

Inspirational Messages From Local Pastors

St. Patrick' and St. William's Technology, psychology and commercialism are not the answer

People all over the world have been preparing for this first Christmas in the new millennium. For many that preparation has involved frustration trying to find parking at stores, rushing through the crowded stores, and desperation at the fear of forgetting someone or something. It seems that Christmas, like everything else, has become very commercialized. Christmas carols have been played on radio and TV for weeks. Some programs have a Christmas theme. Drinkers overindulge, the lonely get more depressed.

Confronted with problems, our world turns to technology to solve some and to psychology to solve others. Even with all our modern communication skills, we have not overcome the selfishness of individuals and nations. For some strange reason, our world refuses to adopt the principles of Jesus Christ. Would that the new millennium would bring about a change of attitude.

Through this advent season churches have contemplated the life and teaching of John the Baptist. This man of great austerity pulled no punches. He preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. That was an external manifestation of the internal attitude of the people that he baptized. Its purpose was to pave the way of the Lord into the hearts and minds of people.

That call of John is brought to the world today by the Church. That spirit pervades the lives of multitudes of people. Many of those who had wandered away from the way of the Lord, stumble back and find their peace with Him. Many who were in spiritual depression look up and find hope. People who have had disagreements make the effort to be reconciled. Some who have been caught up in selfishness, gladly share some of their material blessings. Some, who from one end of the year to the other do not grace the door of a church, come to worship the newborn Savior. So there is hope for the future.

This is a time of joy and happiness as we celebrate the coming of the Savior, the Prince of Peace. For all who are depressed, those who bear physical illnesses, the lonely and the unwanted, He comes bringing peace of mind, heart and soul.

May this first Christmas of the new millennium be a permanent turning point so that the true spirit of Christmas may pervade the lives individuals and of nations.

-Fr. Gerry Condon

First Christian Church Put the emphasis on what's real

Every year our family has a tradition like all families of going to get a tree for Christmas. You may have to hike up through the woods or drive to your local Christmas tree lot. It may be a tall one or small. It may be spruce, pine, fir or some other variety. It may be sparsely branched or so thickly branched you cannot see through its greenery. But at least in our family we cannot have a (dare I say it) a fake tree. At our church we put up a fake tree and I have visited several folks' homes and some of them have fake trees, and for several years now my grandmother in Boise has used a fake tree because of medical problems. But at our house it has to be a real tree.

Now don't get me wrong, I personally would not mind having a fake tree. No more trips to the Christmas tree lot where the best trees cost the most. No more trips to the mountains where the best trees are the farthest from the road. Or in the spot where the snow is deepest. Or when you started out, it was a beautiful day, but now that you're up here, it is snowing heavily and it is much slicker than you thought it would be.

The problem, really is the kids. They expect to have a real tree. They say, "We know you don't have any medical problems like Grandma, soooooo" That's right. We need a real tree.

This year I really did not feel like going to the mountains to get a tree and it is really nice that Green Feed and Seed has trees for sale, so I loaded up the kids and we headed there directly. That is when I discovered the problem. My son Drew said, "Dad, we can't get a tree from here."

I said, "Why not?" He said, "Dad, the trees aren't real there!" I said, "Yes they are and I will show you." Well, to make a long story short my son did discover that the trees at Green Feed are real. Which was good because we were then able to pick one out and pay for it and haul it home and put it up.

You might ask why I brought up this little bit about a real tree. Well it seems like in this day and age we put a whole lot of emphasis on what is not real. I just want to close with an E-mail I received that talks about that a little.

Santa rides in a big red sleigh..... Jesus walks on water.
Santa comes but once a year..... Jesus is an ever-present help.
Santa fills your stockings with nice little goodies..... Jesus supplies all your needs.

Santa comes down the chimney.....Jesus stands at the door and knocks.

You have to wait in line to see Santa..... Jesus is as close as a whisper of His name.

Santa lets you sit on his lap..... Jesus holds you in His arms.

Santa doesn't know your name. He calls you "Little Boy" or "Little Girl"..... Jesus knew your name before you were born. He even knows the future.

Santa has a belly like a bowl full of jelly..... Jesus has a heart full of love.

Santa offers a hearty, "Ho Ho Ho"..... Jesus offers Hope, Help and Happiness.

Santa says, "You'd better not cry"..... Jesus says, "Cast all your cares on me."

Santa's little helpers make toys.....Jesus mends wounded hearts, repairs relationships and builds mansions.

Santa may make you chuckle..... but Jesus gives you joy that is strength.

While Santa puts presents under the Christmas tree..... Jesus gave His life as a gift.

I think my son is right. This Christmas as with every Christmas it has to be the real thing. No more of the fake ones. I hope and pray you all have a very merry Christmas and a wonderful New Year.

-Pastor Andrew Johnson

Christian Life Center Christmas: The Truest Thing in the World

Christmas is the story of the infinite, limitless and all-powerful God of creation identifying with humanity in the finite, limitations and helplessness of the infant child.

The prophet Isaiah foretold the Child's coming in 740 B.C. "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." Isa. 7:14. The great eighteenth century songwriter, Charles Wesley, described this miracle in one of the world's most beloved Christmas carols: "Hark! The herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King. Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinner reconciled!"

Someone once said, "Religion is man trying to reach God, however, Christianity is God reaching man." This is the message and hope of the Christmas story: God and sinners reconciled in the birth of a baby, a helpless infant born two thousand years ago. This child was not born in a palace surrounded by privilege, but in a stable, rife with the sounds and smells of common barnyard animals. This little child did not appear as anything resembling a king and that is the beauty of the Christmas message. God came, in the form of humble flesh, to feel what Spirit cannot feel - what suffering flesh feels. He felt it indeed and He still does.

In an excerpt from his December 23, 1971, TV broadcast for the ABC Evening News, Harry Reasoner captures the significance of this miraculous event:

"On previous Christmases, I have talked about the peculiar nature of Christmas, for Christmas, excuse me if you've heard it before, is such a unique idea that most non-Christians accept it, and I think sometimes envy it. If Christmas is the anniversary of the appearance of the Lord of the Universe in the form of a helpless baby, it's quite a day. It's a startling idea, and the theologians, who sometimes love logic more than they love God, find it uncomfortable. But, if God did it, He had a tremendous insight. People are afraid of God and his very bright light. But everyone has seen babies and almost everyone likes them - so if God wanted to be loved as well as feared, he moved correctly here. And if he wanted to know people as well as rule them he moved correctly, because a baby, growing up, learns all there is to know about people. If God wanted to be intimately a part of man, he moved correctly - for the experience of birth and familyhood is our most intimate and precious experience.

So it comes beyond logic. It is what a bishop I used to know called a kind of divine insanity. It is either all falsehood or it is the truest thing in the world. It is the story of the great innocence of God, the baby, God in the power of man and it is such a dramatic shot toward the heart that if it is not true, for Christmas, nothing is true.

It's all right that so many Christians are touched only once a year by this incomparable story, because some final quiet Christmas morning, the touch will take."

While others may seek more proof this Christmas, may we, like the Wise Men, seek Him instead.

-Pastor Tim Van Cleave

Lexington Baptist Church How Does One Approach Bethlehem?

"How does one approach Bethlehem?" Most people approach it from the north as Mary and Joseph did the first Christmas, for Bethlehem is about six miles south of Jerusalem. One could also approach it from the south or from the west or perhaps from the east--as the Magi did.

"How does one approach Bethlehem?" Tradition tells us Mary approached it riding a donkey. Christian Arabs, even today, find camels helpful in approaching the town. For centuries pilgrims

approached it on foot. Today, many people approach it riding on a Mercedes-Benz bus.

"How does one approach Bethlehem?" Mary and Joseph approached it slowly for Mary was very pregnant. Pilgrims throughout the ages have approached it cautiously, for local inhabitants have always seen in pilgrims the opportunity to make money.

Once again we ask, "How does one approach Bethlehem?" Each of us needs to answer this question. What approach will you use to approach Bethlehem and celebrate Christmas this year?

Perhaps some of us will emphasize the family approach. Christmas for us is a celebration of family. It feels good to be all together and coming to church at Christmas for it maintains an important family tradition.

Although there are several ways to approach Bethlehem, there is really only one correct approach to the celebration of the Lord's birth. This approach was demonstrated by a nun in the cave in Bethlehem which marks the place where our Lord was born. She quietly walked to the silver star which marks the spot of Jesus's birth, dropped to her knees and kissed it as an act of adoration and worship.

Yes, to properly approach Bethlehem and Christmas, we must be willing to humble ourselves at the manger, forget our pride and to let the love of God reach down from heaven and touch us.

Scripture tells so beautifully, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given." In Jesus, God is saying to each of us, "I love you, I forgive you of your sins." Because of the manger, the cross and the empty tomb, all believers can join a pilgrimage that will end at the heavenly Jerusalem. For unto us is given salvation freely, fully and completely.

How do you plan to approach Bethlehem this year? How do you plan to celebrate Christmas? I suggest that each of us spend a few minutes on our knees humbling ourselves before the Lord as the shepherds once did. The Magi, even though they were kings, fell on their knees when they came to Jesus. All of the saints found God more approachable from their knees. A nun unconcerned about the stares of others, only recognized one thing: that she stood at the place where the Son of God supposedly once lay. Therefore, she positioned herself appropriately for worship.

From your knees, spend a portion of this Christmas thanking God for His gracious gift.

From your knees, confess your sins to God.

From your knees, invite the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit to deepen your faith.

From your knees, celebrate Christmas.

-Pastor Glenn Anderson

Church Services

First Christian Church

Sunday School begins at 9:30 a.m. each Sunday at the First Christian Church, 293 N. Gale Street, Heppner, with worship service at 11 a.m.

All are welcome to attend.

Lexington Baptist Church

Christmas Eve worship service at the Lexington Baptist Church, 170 'B' Street, Lexington, Sunday, December 24, will be held at 11 a.m. with a candlelight service planned at 6 p.m.

All are welcome to attend.

St. Patrick Church

Confessions will be held at St. Patrick's, 525 N. Gale, Heppner, on Saturday, December 23, from 11:30 a.m. to noon and 4-4:30 p.m.

Mass will be held on Saturday, December 23, with a Vigil at 5 p.m. and on Sunday, December 24, at 11 a.m.

On December 24 a Vigil of Christmas will be held, with Christmas carols at 8:30 p.m., a candlelight procession at 9 p.m., with the Blessing of the Manger Scene and a Christmas Vigil Mass.

On Christmas Day, Mass will begin at 11 a.m.

St. William's Church

Mass will be held at St. William's Church in Ione on Sunday, December 24, at 8:45 a.m.

On Christmas Day, Mass will be held at 8:45 a.m. with the Blessing of the Manger Scene and Christmas carols.

Hope and Valby Lutheran, All Saints Episcopal Churches

An ecumenical worship service will be held at Hope Lutheran, 675 S. Alfalfa, Heppner, on Sunday, December 24, beginning at 10 a.m., with Holy Communion. Both Lutheran and Episcopal bishops will preside.

Christmas Eve candlelight services will be held on Sunday, December 24, at Hope Lutheran at 6 p.m.; at All Saints Episcopal, W. Church St., Heppner, at 7 p.m.; and at Valby Lutheran at 9 p.m.

BUSINESS CARDS Heppner Gazette-Times

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