

## Christmas messages from local pastors

### Ione United Church of Christ 'If an angel appeared to you'

Gabriel said to Mary, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you." The Greek word that is translated as "Hail" is sometimes used as a greeting. More often, it means "Rejoice" or "Be glad." It is a joyful, hopeful greeting. Mary was troubled in her mind, like a pool that is stirred by a sudden current and she wondered what sort of greeting this might be.

Imagine what it would be like to have one of God's messengers say to you, "Rejoice, be glad. God loves you. The Lord is near." Would you be eager or afraid?

"Do not be afraid," said the angel, "for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." It is unlikely that God would send a messenger to you to say precisely these words, but what might such a messenger say to you? "Do not be afraid. God has a special love for you. And God would like to do something remarkable in your life, something that you may not even believe is possible." You may have to watch, listen, and pray for a long time to gain a glimpse of what this might be. You may need to talk with someone whom you trust to guide you in order to confirm what the spirit is saying in your heart.

"He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High," said the angel. "And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom there will be no end." The good news to Mary was not just a private message, and the miracle was not a private blessing just for her sake. What God was doing in Mary would change the lives of many, and would establish the power of God among us in a way that would last forever. In the same way, God's word to you may transform your attitudes toward yourself, the people around you, and of your place in society. What God is doing in each of us is a part of the way that God is transforming the world.

Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" This question may not imply doubt. In a very similar moment, the father of John the Baptist asked, "How shall I know this?" and was unable to speak until John was born because of his disbelief. Yet Mary keeps her voice. "How shall this be?" is a question of "How?" not "Will this really happen?" You might have the same question, especially when our hearts lead us to attempt what does not seem likely to succeed.

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy, the Son of God." God's messenger might answer our questions saying, "This will be done by the Holy Spirit and by the power of God, and therefore what is done in you will be holy, a work of God."

"For with God," said the angel, "nothing will be impossible." And Mary replied, "I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word." She freely accepted both her general responsibility to God, and the special miracle, which would alter the course of her life forever.

This Christmas, may you be blessed by knowing that God loves you, and that God is with you. May God speak to your heart to let you know both the promise and the task that is set before you. May you have confidence that this will happen by the work of the Holy Spirit and by the Power of God, and that with God all things will be possible. And may you find the peace to accept the honor of being a servant of God, and the courage to allow and not resist the wonderful possibilities that God is placing in your life. Amen.

-Reverend Paul Clay

### First Christian Church 'So what's the plan'

I heard a report on the news today that most people in America will travel more than fifty miles this holiday season to be with friends and family. Here in Heppner we kind of chuckle at that fact and say, "We travel that distance every day."

About two and a half years ago, I made the decision to go back to school for a little more education. Over the next two years, I worked very hard and completed the course work that the school requested I do to complete this particular degree program. I also began to prepare for a trip to California just in case I actually finished. Now, of course, no trip to Los Angeles can be done without taking the family and taking in the sites, so a little more planning had to be done. Hotels were booked. Tickets to certain major theme parks had to be purchased. The trip had to be planned out. Well, just this last week my family and I made this trip. After many "well ok" and after two years of waiting we made the trip to my graduation ceremony and certain theme parks in Anaheim. It was a blast and we had fun and loved the weather and then we came home. It took a lot of planning and work and two and a half years of time to have a week and a half's worth of fun with memories to last a lifetime. But it only affected four people- my wife, my kids, and myself.

Almost two thousand years ago, some well-laid plans began to unfold here on earth with the birth of a baby boy. It was the start of a plan to deal with the sins of mankind and to redeem the whole of human kind to a proper and good relationship with their Creator. This season as you celebrate Christmas remember the planning that started at Creation and led one man to the cross so we could have a right relationship with God. And this plan, done so long ago, not only affected those folks in their time, but affects you and I today. So much planning and it was just as much for you and me as it was for them. For that reason we can truly celebrate the birth of our Savior and praise God for the wonderful holiday season. Have a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

-Pastor Andrew Johnson

### Christian Life Center 'The birth of a king'

The first two chapters of Matthew give us five proofs that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is truly King and has the right to rule and reign over each of our lives. The wise men who came seeking for Him stopped in Jerusalem and asked, "Where is He who is born King?" The Christ child was born to be a supreme ruler and a supreme monarch. In fact, John the writer of Revelation says "He is King over all kings and Lord over all lords." He is the greatest, the most supreme of all monarchs.

The first proof is found in the genealogy of Jesus in Matt. 1:1-17. Here we have the descendants from Abraham down to the birth of Christ. To be born a king one must have a royal heritage, and these verses show Christ's royal heritage. While the racial line of the Jews came from Abraham, the royal line began with David. To possess a royal lineage, one would need to be a son of Abraham and a son of David. Verse 1 of chapter 17 starts out showing us that Jesus fulfilled those two requirements, and thus had a genealogy of royalty.

The second proof of his kingship is his royal nature. A King was one who the people went to for mercy and grace. The King had the right of life and death. Jesus is the King who we can go to for pardon, forgiveness, and favor. When you consider the following people who were in Jesus' lineage, it becomes apparent that his ancestors were definitely in need of mercy.

First off, we look at Abraham. We see that he was a man in need of God's grace and mercy. Abraham was a great man, but he also was a sinful man. He lied blatantly and flagrantly about his own wife to try to protect her when he was in Egypt. He doubted the power of God. He had an adulterous relationship with his own handmaid because he didn't believe God could really give him a child. Ishmael was the product of that relationship, and was a cursed child in many ways. Abraham was a liar, doubter and adulterer; and so he was a sinful man.

Next, consider David, who was known as the man after God's own heart. He was a bloody man, a man of many battles, many massacres and many deaths. He sowed seeds of dissipation by marrying many women. He was a horrendous excuse for a father, losing his children by allowing them to fall in dissipation, evil and even rebellion. He was exceedingly sinful in his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband. He acted as if he was insane to try to escape from a circumstance he thought God was unable to deliver him out of. His son Solomon was even worse than he was.

What is God showing us by all of this? He is showing that His nature is one of mercy and grace, and that Mary was also born a sinner in need of grace and mercy, just like you and I.

The third proof was His royal birth. Verse 18 of chapter 1 reminds us that Jesus was born of a virgin. Mary was not impregnated by man but by the Holy Spirit. The scripture tells us that Mary and Joseph did not have a physical relationship until after Jesus was born. Joseph had the right to divorce Mary when he found out that she was pregnant, but after the angel visited him to tell him it was okay to take her as his wife, he changed his mind. This was not just another baby. This was God coming down in the flesh to dwell with you and I.

The fourth proof is the royal worship He receives gifts from the wise men after He is born. Chapter 2:1 tells us that the wise men came from the east to bring Him gold, frankincense and myrrh. The Gold speaks of His kingship, the frankincense speaks of His deity, and the myrrh speaks of His humanity. Time doesn't allow me to go into all the details of importance in the wise men visiting the King, but as you can see, the wise men's gifts show their acknowledgment of Him as king.

The fifth and final proof of Jesus' royalty I would like to cover is the fact of his royal decree. God gave prophecies to Old Testament men who foretold the details of Jesus' birth. It was foretold that He would be born of a virgin, that He would be born in Bethlehem and that He would come out of Egypt. It was foretold of the weeping that would come as a result of the massacre of little children. It was foretold that he would be called a Nazarene. Jesus fulfilled every element of the royal decree of God. He is the King in every sense. He is King by birth, by decree, by lineage, by character, and by worship.

While many thought he was coming to rule over the people of the time, His first plan has always been to rule and reign over the hearts and lives of mankind without forcing himself on anyone. The time will come when every one will stand before God and declare that His is Lord of lords and King of kings. Why not choose to make Him Lord of your life right now, before it is too late.

-Pastor Tim VanCleave

### Heppner United Methodist Church 'It's a wonderful life'

The classic Christmas movie, "It's a Wonderful Life," reminds us each year of the value of a life well lived. Jimmy Stewart, in his role as the manager of the small town Savings and Loan, has been a positive influence to all around him. Discouragement can set it, as it does for him on Christmas Eve when the daily bank deposit is lost. But friends rally to his side, his eyes are opened, and he proclaims: "It is a wonderful life."

There is a message here for us all: our attitudes and helpfulness, throughout our lives, does make a big difference. But we know something the Jimmy Stewart's character doesn't know. We know that the bank deposit wasn't just lost; it was stolen by the one man in town who was trying to prove that reaching out to help others is not such a noble thing to do. We are able to see the evil, but we are still asked to accept the thought that life is indeed wonderful. That is not always easy to do. When we see evil at work, we think, and sometimes even begin to speak, negative thoughts.

The message of Christmas down through the ages is that we are to embrace the positive, the good, the just and right. When love is shown, when love is returned, even in the face of evil, the world begins to change for the better. Just like the world of Jimmy Stewart's little hometown, our communities will grow to become the reflections of our won attitudes today.

Today's smile, today's gift, today's love, will be the heritage we leave for our next generation. A joyous, merry, positive and love-filled Christmas to us all.

-Pastor Keith Brudevold

### Heppner Nazarene Church 'The Ten Commandments Christmas'

The following contains some good advice that will help us keep selfishness in check this Christmas:

I. Thou shalt not leave: "Christ" out of Christmas, making it "Xmas." To some, "X" means "unknown."

II. Thou shalt prepare thy soul for Christmas. Spend not so much on gifts that your soul is forgotten.

III. Thou shalt not let Santa Claus replace Christ: thus robbing the day of its spiritual reality.

IV. Thou shalt not burden: the shop girl, the mailman and the merchant with complaints and demands.

V. Thou shalt give yourself with your gift. This will increase its value a hundred fold and he who receives it shall treasure it forever.

VI. Thou shalt not value gifts received by the cost. Even the least expensive may signify love and that is more priceless than silver and gold.

VII. Thou shalt not neglect the needy. Share your blessings with many who will go hungry and cold.

VIII. Thou shalt not neglect your church. Its services highlight the true meaning of the season.

IX. Thou shalt be as a little child. Jesus said, "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

X. Thou shalt give your hear to Christ. Let Him be at the top of your Christmas list.

Original author unknown.

-Pastor Duane Jones

### St. Patrick's and St. William's Parishes 'Biblical simplicity'

Children love to hear stories. Adults love to tell them stories. All of us rejoice in the story of Christmas. It is a story of peace and goodwill, a story of angels, and shepherds, and stars, and Magi, and travelers, and music. This story is told in various ways. Some people tell this story by putting lights around their homes; some do so by having Christmas trees; some do so by giving gifts; businesses do so by having sales; the Church does so by recalling the words of the Bible.

While some of us tend to bemoan the commercialism associated with Christmas, the fact is that Christmas would not be the same without it. If we were truly unhappy about that we would not go on shopping sprees, we would not squander our money on gifts; we would not mail cards to our friends far and wide. So perhaps we have to admit that we are touched by the story, and it makes us all ambassadors of peace and goodwill.

What is this wonderful story that moves so many people to rejoice? The Bible expresses with great simplicity. In the words of the angels: "This day in David's city a savior has been born to you, the Messiah and Lord." (Luke 2:11) St. Luke also tells us, Mary "gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger." (Luke 2:7) The wise men from the east inquired: "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage!" (Matthew 2:2) Who could have imagined 2000 years ago that such simplicity would move million to faith in the newborn savior?

May this Christmas be a time for you of genuine faith in the savior of mankind. May you experience the true inner joy, peace and happiness that Jesus brought to the world and which He offers you this Christmas season.

-Father Gerry Condon

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