

# Christmas messages from area churches

## St. Patrick's and St. William's Parishes 'Lessons from shepherds'

At this time of the year we commemorate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Sometimes we overlook the significance of the shepherds in the nativity account. So it is good to recall that shepherds came to visit and to play homage to him. It is interesting to recall that at the time of Jesus the status of shepherds was a lowly one. It still does not rate very high in our world today. Yet, it was to such lowly people that the angels appeared and informed them that the Savior was born in Bethlehem. The shepherds, for their part, welcomed the news and went to Bethlehem to worship the Savior.

They tended their sheep probably far from the cities and towns. More than likely they were poor. Material poverty is to recognize. While they were engaged in their simple work, the Good News came to them. Once the shepherds received the message, they did not sit back and discuss the fact that they had been informed of a great event. The message really moved them to action. They immediately set out to search for the Child Savior. They made the journey to Bethlehem and found that what the angels had said was true. With their physical eyes they saw a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. However, with the eyes of faith they recognized the Child as the Savior.

Then they had to return to their flocks. Perhaps the journey was cold; perhaps it was treacherous. Yet they went back "praising and glorifying God for all they had seen and heard." They had experienced this magnificent event and yet they went back to tending their flocks. Their lives would never be the same. They now had a new hope, a new sense of the presence of God with them. Their world has not been transformed, but they have been transformed and now had a new vision of life.

We have not seen what the shepherds saw, but we have learned the message of the angels. Like the shepherds we need to see Christ with the eyes of faith. We see not just a baby, but our Savior, God's love made flesh, Emmanuel, God with us. When this holiday season is over, like the shepherds, we also must go back to work. It may be to our typewriters, or computers, our committees, our workshops. Let us do so glorifying and praising God for his goodness to us. Our world will not be transformed, but we will have renewed hope and inspiration.

Our religion leads to a different commitment to life. It teaches us how close we can be to God and how close God is to us. In celebrating the birth of Jesus, we see how God has immersed Himself in our world. It brings us joy to know that our God is with us, that He is watching over us, that He is a source of joy and of spiritual strength. Such was the joy that the shepherds experienced; that the Magi experienced and that Simeon and Anna experienced when they met the Christ Child.

May that joy be ours, not only in the Christmas season, but throughout our lives.

-Father Gerry Condon

## Heppner Nazarene Church 'Nothing's Impossible'

Luke 1:26-38: In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to

have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her. (NIV)

For God Nothing's Impossible and Christmas is a time of miracles. The passage above mentions at least three Christmas miracles that most of us really believe; and one Christmas miracle that many of us only pretend to believe.

The first of the Christmas miracles that most of us really believe is that: The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell her that she would bring God's son into the world. Christmas without angels is unthinkable. What kind of story would we have to share if God had telephoned Mary to tell her that she was going to have a child by the Holy Spirit?

I can hear that conversation now, "Hello, Mary? This is God speaking, I'm phoning to tell you that, of all the women in the world I have selected you to..." (and about that time Mary interrupts and says), "I'm sorry, but we don't take telephone solicitations." Clunk.

And what if St. Luke had written: "And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, suddenly, a messenger from Western Union appeared to them saying, "Telegram. Telegram. I bring you good news of a great joy which will be to all the nations."

No. A technological announcement would not have sufficed. Beside it would have ruined our hymns. Can you imagine singing instead of "Angels From the Realms"; we sang, "Faxes From The Realms Of Glory"? Angels are so much a part of the Christmas miracle that we can hardly do without them.

The Second Christmas miracle that most of us accept is that Jesus was born of a Virgin. Why not? We have believed the story of the Resurrection. Believing the story of the Virgin Birth is pretty easy. Besides, it seems perfectly fitting that, "The only begotten Son of God," should have a unique birth. Especially in our day and age of cloning sheep, DNA typing, artificial insemination. Nothing's Impossible for God.

The third miracle of Christmas that we accept without question is the miracle of the "Incarnation." That means "God With Us." For some this miracle is a little harder to swallow than the other two. "Why would God become man?" That is a good question.

A great philosopher once explained that mystery by telling this story. Once upon a time there was a man, who every Christmas Eve, he stayed home alone while his family went off to church. He did not believe in the miracle of "Emmanuel," that is "God With Us."

He often congratulated himself that he was too sophisticated and educated to be taken in by tales about God becoming a man. On one particular Christmas Eve he was about to doze off when he heard a tapping sound coming from the window in his kitchen. He went to investigate and found a bird that had somehow managed to light upon the windowsill and was tapping the glass with its beak.

As the man approached the window, the bird flew but not far away. When the man looked out at the ground he saw not one bird, but dozens of birds, cold, wet, huddled under the light of his porch. "Poor creatures," he thought, "they look miserable. They need some shelter from the wet and cold. I'll see if I can coax them onto my enclosed porch."

He went to the porch and made a dry place for them. However, making a place for them was easy, getting them to use it was another story. First he called them, but they did not understand his speech. Then he tried to motion with his arms but that only frightened them away. Then he tried to lead them in with a trail of bread but they did not understand his motives.

At last the man said to himself, "If only I were a bird, just for a moment; then I could fly down to them and lead them in my house." As he spoke these words to himself the bells of the church began to toll midnight; announcing the birth of Jesus Christ. Suddenly, the man knew why God, in the person of His Son, would become a man. God did it so that he could lead us into the safety and warmth of the father's house.

Most of us accept these three miracles of Christmas without question. Still there is at least one Christmas miracle that seems completely beyond belief. It's the promise of the angel that, "For nothing is impossible with God."

It's not that we have difficulty believing that God can do anything. The problem we have with this miracle is that- "Can God do anything with me" (With you/me-personally). Yet, if we are going to be all we can be in this world for ourselves, and most particularly "for God" then this is the miracle we must believe. This is the miracle that Mary had to personally believe about herself, before she could become "Mary the Mother of Jesus."

If you think that you have a hard time believing in the Virgin Birth, then try and put yourself in Mary's place when she first heard it from the angel Gabriel. Nine full months later she held the proof in her arms. Then she knew, she fully understood, the truth of what the angel had said: "For nothing is impossible with God."

This is why our Hope is in Jesus. I have a challenge for each of you this Christmas. I want you to believe in yourself just a much as you believe in God. I want you to believe that God loves you. That God needs you. That God has a plan for you. I want you to believe that- "For nothing is impossible with God." When we finally accept this fact, then, our hope in the Christmas Miracle will become complete.

-Pastor Duane Jones

## Heppner Christian Church 'All I Want For Christmas'

We live in one of the most prosperous nations in the world. Livability in the United States of America is a given principle, which no one challenges. We can ask the question, "What do you want for Christmas?" The answer to that question in some sense fills the stores of America with so many wants that it sometimes boggles the mind. Sometimes the answer to that question can come from deep in the heart and does not have the shallow smack of a commercial Christmas. "That mom and dad could get along," "That grandma would get well," "That we would have enough to eat," "That our son will make it home from the war," "That God would give us one more Christmas together." At times the deep answers to a shallow question tug at our heart strings because we can remember when we have asked those very questions. Many times the way those questions have been answered in our lives determine how we feel especially this time of year.

Two thousand years ago there was a nation that struggled under the rule of an occupational government from Rome that controlled most of the known world at that time. This nation was asking for a gift that had been promised to them many centuries before that time of a savior that would come and establish his government and somehow everything would be all right if only he would come. But when they found out that the savior was just a baby that was born in a manger to a poor couple, Joseph and Mary, they wondered how, how would my question be answered? Certainly God had a different idea about what this salvation would look like than those who saw the baby born in the manger. God of course planted little clues for those to see who had eyes, but even his mother with her storing up all of these memories of her son could not see what God had in mind. One clue was that Joseph was to name him Jesus, "for he would save his people from their sins." Another clue was that he would be called Immanuel, which means "God with us." It wasn't until 33 years later that the true nature of God's story and plan to save the world began to be seen as the right answer to a very tough question that they had been asking for many years.

I am not sure all of our questions will be answered in this life time. Not all of the gifts we want for Christmas will be given. Sometimes our gift is dependent on the actions of someone else, or on time, circumstance, or some other factor outside our control. But the thought I want to leave you with for this Christmas is that 2000 years ago a gift was given and since that time God has continued to give a gift to each of us. It does take faith to hope for a brighter future, but I hope you can do that very thing because of the gift of Jesus Christ that was given to us through Mary in the form of a baby. Truly the hope of the whole world and your hope this Christmas. Wishing you all a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

-Pastor Andrew Johnson

## Heppner Nazarene to hold Christmas Eve service

Heppner Nazarene welcomes all to attend a Christmas Eve advent and communion service on Friday, Dec. 24 at 7 p.m. Traditional Christmas music will be shared and a message entitled, "Search for the perfect gift," will be shared. Do you have all your Christmas shopping done yet? There are some folks that are hard to shop for. You have no idea what they want or need. You don't know what items, size or color to

choose. However, God knows exactly what they need. He gives us good and perfect gifts.

Just to help us keep our spiritual perspectives in perspective, during these last hours leading up to Christmas let us be reminded of some of God's gifts to us.

Heppner Nazarene is located at 335 N. Gilmore, across from the hospital.

## Neighborhood Center to close for holidays

The Heppner Neighborhood Center will be closed from Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2004 through Sunday, Jan. 2, and will reopen with normal business hours on Monday, Jan. 3. It is asked that all donations be held during this closure and not left at the Center.



By DAVID SYKES  
REALTOR

### HOMEOWNER'S TAX HAVEN

You can forget about the old, confusing IRS regulations on tax breaks when you sell your principal home. Forget about the once-in-a-lifetime exemption of up to \$125,000 in profits for those over 55 years of age. Forget about having to buy or build another house within two years of the sale which cost as much or more than the one you sold in order to defer paying capital gains taxes. The new look is here and it is great for homeowners.

The latest tax law now allows homeowners to avoid paying taxes on the first

\$250,000 of profits in a home if they are single, or on the first \$500,000 of profits if they are married at the time they sell the home.

Because a homeowner can use the exemption repeatedly, as long as he or she lives in each house for at least two years, most will never have to pay taxes on profits from home sales. This change exempts over 99% of home sales from capital gains taxes.

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## Extension to be closed for holidays

Oregon State University, Morrow County Extension Service will be closed on Dec. 23, 24 and 31 to celebrate the holidays. We will resume regular office hours of 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, on Jan. 3, 2005.

High View Mortgage  
wishes everyone Happy Holidays!



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