

Messages of Christmas hope from area churches...

Christ in Christmas

We pray that the residents of the Morrow County area will experience the genuine merry Christmas and happy future that Jesus' birth promises.

At a time when ISIS-type terrorists threaten us, when rumors of wars abound, when extra-ordinary storms and earthquakes are the norm, when Ebola ravages entire populations, when a person's house may burn today, when he may have an automobile accident or be diagnosed with cancer tomorrow, during these times it is good to know Jesus came with outstretched arms, inviting, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden."

Only in his care and with the strength he gives is there absolute security and perfect peace of mind. Yes, unto us a child is born, a son is given... and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

We pray that you will personally experience the benefits of this great event: Christmas.

Pastor David Jenkins
Christian Life Center

A Sonnet for Christmas

We watch and wait for the Christ child to come
Looking to the malls, the shops and the lights.
We seek an intangible gift from some
earthly thing, hoping to improve our plight.

But as much as we look we will not find
That which is hidden in places humble
and small, in places so grand or refined.
The gift yearned for is found in a bundle.

In the strangest of places - a manger -
the blessing of God comes in an infant
And the dark world, so full of harm, danger,
and uncaring is changed in an instant.

The gift sought is in front of our faces,
small moments and odd little places.

Stacy Shelton
Lone Community Church

The largest gift we will ever receive

A baby is born. Angels sing. Shepherds come running. It's a well-known story, and our fondness for telling it has enlarged it in ways probably never intended by its original author. Luke is brief: there's Joseph, Mary, a child in a manger, and some curious shepherds (who are the only ones to see angels that night). Matthew tells us elsewhere about a star and an unknown number of wise men bearing gifts, but we've otherwise populated our nativity scenes with details the Bible doesn't mention.

And by filling in the gaps with donkeys, camels, an innkeeper, a stable with a host of angels fluttering directly overhead, three kings with crowns, gently falling snow, and maybe even a little drummer boy, we risk crowding out the chief actor in this drama: God. This is a story about God, and God's unquenchable love for those who were made in his image—a love that persists in spite of our tendency to tarnish that image with selfishness, pride, greed and more. What God made good, we polluted.

So what's a Creator to do when his good creation turns into a mess? God answered that question by stepping right into the middle of it. Instead of washing his hands of us and starting over somewhere else, God slipped into human skin inside the womb of a young girl in an obscure corner of this messy world. For reasons that escape us, God chose to do things the hard way, and save us from ourselves in this most peculiar manner—by becoming one of us, taking on human flesh so he could teach and heal and show us what God's love looks like. This is a love that stops at nothing to set things right again. No cost is too great—not the distress of a human birth in a place fit only for animals; not growing up to be the target of taunts and threats from the religious community; not being subjected to torture and death without cause; not lacking a place to lay his head until he rests in a stone cold tomb briefly. The world had never seen a costly love like this before, and had done nothing to deserve the gift of God's own self.

But God gave it to us anyway the night of Jesus' birth, and ever since to all who will take hold of this gift. And in its unwrapping—in getting better acquainted with this reckless God—so many other gifts are found waiting for us inside: forgiveness, peace, hope, joy, love and the promise of life in God's presence forever.

That baby in the manger may be the smallest figure in the nativity scene, but concealed inside is the largest gift we will ever receive: God with us. Emmanuel.

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all." (Titus 2:11)

Rev. Katy Anderson
The Shared Ministry of Hope Lutheran Church
& All Saints Episcopal Church

O Come Let Us Adore Him: A Story of Unimaginable Joy

The wonder of a star - the awe of an angel's song - the whimper of a newborn babe lying in a manger - a humble donkey - the drummer boy drumming - shepherds watching their flocks - the coming of the faithful - and the silence of that Holy night. These glimpses of well-known carols remind us of the fear, anxiety and finally the unimaginable joy present at the miracle of our Lord's birth.

The carol, "O Come, All Ye Faithful," is one of many that tells the story of that precious night more than two thousand years ago.

"O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem. Come and behold Him, born the Kind of angels."

"Sing choirs of angels. Sing in exultation. O sing all ye citizens of heaven above. Glory to God, All glory in the highest."

"Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning. Jesus, to thee be all glory given. Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing."

"O come let us adore Him. O come let us adore Him. O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord."

This is a story of a very young couple, the woman hugely pregnant, who traveled by donkey to Bethlehem some 90 miles from their home. How exhausted she must have been. There, she gave birth to a son whose first bed was a feed trough for oxen and cows.

In the fields not far from town, an angel was sent from God to tell the shepherds about the babe's birth.

The shepherds must have been terrified. They were sitting in a field with their sheep, who were probably bedded down for the night, when out of nowhere an angel appeared. The angel told them to be calm and to go and find this baby. And they did. And then they told everyone they met about the birth.

Later in the story, men riding camels brought gifts to the newborn babe. They had looked to the heavens for guidance and were so inspired all they wanted to do was to follow where the star led them.

Each part of this story requires one thing from each participant: great faith.

Here's a question to ponder on this, the eve of our Savior's birth: Is our faith as strong as that young couple, those shepherds, or the wise men who travelled to Bethlehem? Would we have been a willing participant at the Nativity?

We wish for you this Christmas the courage of those humble shepherds, the spirit of generosity found in the wise men and the unimaginable joy of that young couple as they welcomed God's light into the world.

Please join us at Heppner United Methodist Church as we gather this evening, Christmas Eve, to celebrate the story of our Savior's birth.

Patty Nance and Cara Osmin, pastors
Heppner United Methodist Church

A Gift from a King

In Matthew 2 we read of the coming of Magi (the wise men) from the east following a star. They arrived in Jerusalem to ask for directions to the one who had been born king of the Jews, for they wished to go and worship him. Of course Herod, king of the Jews, hears of this request and promptly asks the Magi to locate this child for him that, "He too may go and worship the king." And so Herod tells the Magi to go and look in Bethlehem of Judea for the child born king of the Jews.

We know the story. They go and find Jesus and bow and worship him and present to him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. After they did this the passage of Scripture says that they, being warned in a dream, did not go back and tell Herod about the child but went home by a different route. It also says that Joseph was warned in a dream to flee to Egypt in order to escape from Herod, king of the Jews.

King Herod at that time gave a gift to the people of Bethlehem. Realizing he had been outwitted by the Magi, he had every child two and under in Bethlehem killed so as to protect his precious power. Isn't it interesting how the world seeks to keep and hold power even today? But Jesus on the other hand, being the true king, died for the sins of his people, who had rejected him, and for the sins of the whole world. A gift from one king was death and sorrow and pain. The gift from the other was freedom from all of that.

This Christmas season let us remember Jesus the King and the gift he gave, the forgiveness of sins to all who believe. It was and is so much more than anything else we can give.

Andrew Johnson
Heppner Christian Church



Christmas Is Joy, Peace and Love

"Behold, I bring you good News of a great Joy...; for to you is born this day...A Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

We celebrate Christmas with great rejoicing for three reasons:

1. It is the birthday of our God who became man and savior to save us from our sins.
2. It is the birthday of God who came to share His love with us.
3. It is the anniversary of the day when Almighty God came to live with us as Emmanuel.

First of all, Christmas is the feast of God's sending us a savior. Jesus, the Incarnation of God as man, came to save us from the bondage of sin. "God so loved the world that He sent His only son so that every one who believes in Him might not perish, but might have eternal life" (John 3:16). We celebrate that Incarnation today as Good News because we have a Divine savior. As our savior, Jesus atoned for our sins and liberated us from slavery to sin by His suffering, death and resurrection. Every Christmas reminds us that we still need this savior to be reborn in our hearts and to live there, for we need Him every day to free us from evil habits, addictions and unjust, impure and uncharitable tendencies. Hence, Christmas challenges us to accept Jesus our as our Lord and God and our personal savior and to surrender our sinful lives to Him, allowing Him to rule our lives.

Secondly, Christmas is the feast of God's sharing His Love with us. Jesus, as our savior, brought the "Good News" that our God is a loving, forgiving, merciful and rewarding God who wants to save us through His son Jesus Christ. Christmas reminds us that we have to allow this God of unconditional love to be reborn in us and to start living in us. So, let us allow Jesus to be reborn in our hearts and lives today and every day and radiate His light around us, as a sharing and selfless love, compassionate words, deeds, unconditional forgiveness, the spirit of humble service and overflowing generosity.

Thirdly, Christmas is the feast of Emmanuel, i.e., God living within us. Christmas is the feast of the Emmanuel who became in the New Testament God — with — us; Emmanuel, who continues to live with us in all the events of our lives as announced by the angel to Mary. Hence every Christmas reminds us that we are bearers of God with the missionary duty of conveying Jesus to others around us by loving others as Jesus did, through sacrificial, humble and committed service. Sharing with others Jesus, the Emmanuel living within us, is the best Christmas gift we can give to or receive from others.

God Bless,
Fr. Papa Rao Pasala
St. Patrick's and St. William's Catholic parishes

Our Gift

Have you ever lay in bed at night and asked yourself the question...is there something more? Have you struggled with desperation, addiction, loneliness, loss or anxiety? Have you been sick and tired of being sick and tired? Have you carried a deep anger or bitterness that keeps you from the ones that should bring love and comfort to you? Do you realize how much of your life is lived through the wounds of your soul?

Yet, you push through your daily routine and this time of year you even tie a Christmas or holiday bow on it? You fear that this struggle may never end? What if... your very question is the answer and the something more is some *one* more?

God formed man from the dust of the earth and then breathed life into him. He is that close to us today, simply a breath away. Our prayer for you is that as you read these words it would release the Kingdom of God into your life. That it would spark hope and dispel any darkness. Jesus proclaimed in John 8:1, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

That very light brings healing to the darkest of places in our lives. Hope lies in healing and peace lies in freedom, all brought into existence by the very first Christmas gift that is the great "I AM" born of a virgin...the Son of God who lived, died and rose again.

The family of Lighthouse Heppner

That's no Christmas tree... Justice Court Report



This is no Christmas tree; this tree blew over into the front yard of Bill and Merilee McDowell on Rock Street in Heppner during the windstorm Dec. 11. The couple said they were on their way to Eugene when it happened, and returned to find this mess waiting for them. —Contributed photo

Morrow County Justice of the Peace Ann Spicer has released the following Justice Court report:
—Kassandra Rayne Gaines, 27, of Heppner was found guilty of violating the Basic Rule 73/55 and was fined \$160.

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Area Christmas Services

Several area churches will celebrate Christmas with Christmas Eve or Christmas services. Here are a few of the services happening in our communities:	Dec. 24 at 7 p.m. Refreshments prior at 6:30 p.m. Heppner Christian Church Christmas Eve service, Dec. 24 at 6 p.m.	mas carols at 8:30 p.m.; candlelight procession, blessing of the nativity scene, vigil Mass at 9 p.m.
Heppner Church of the Nazarene	The Shared Ministry of Hope Lutheran Church and All Saints Episcopal Church	Thursday, Dec. 25, Christmas Mass, 11 a.m. St. William's Catholic Parish
Christmas Eve candlelight service with the children's choir, Dec. 24 at 6:30 p.m.	Christmas Eve service with lessons, carols, candles and Holy Communion at Hope Lutheran Church, Dec. 24 at 7 p.m.	Thursday, Dec. 25, blessing of the nativity scene, Christmas carols, Christmas Mass at 8:45 a.m.
Heppner United Methodist Church	St. Patrick's Catholic Parish	Lone Community Church
Christmas Eve service on	Wednesday, Dec. 24, Christ-	Christmas Eve services, Dec. 24 at 7 p.m. and 11 p.m.