

Christmas Messages From Area Churches

Two Kings! Two Evangelions!

“Truth to Christ cannot be treason to Caesar.” -Samuel Rutherford, 17th Century Pastor/Theologian

The birth of our Lord Jesus Christ not only gives us a day on our calendar to celebrate God becoming man, but it marks the start of the calendar itself. As it was God who spoke time into existence, it seems only fitting to number the years on our calendars with the birth of this God becoming man. What is interesting, however, is at the time of Christ’s birth, there was another Lord on scene, Caesar Augustus. There was an attempt to make his birth the start of the calendar year. Here is part of an inscription found chiseled on the ruins of an old government building in Asia Minor (date 9-6 BC):

“It is a day which we may justly count as equivalent to the beginning of everything, ... the most perfect consummation for human life ... as it were, a saviour ... and whereas the birthday of the God [Augustus] was the beginning for the world of the glad tidings [in the original Greek evangelion] that have come to men through him ... the reckoning of time for the course of human life should begin with his birth.”

The deification of Caesar did not stop there, for it was said, “Salvation is to be found in none other save Augustus, and there is no other name given to men in which they can be saved.” Ethelbert Stauffer, a German historian, said this was the religious principle of the Roman Empire from Augustus Caesar on.

Within the historical context of the beginning of our calendar, we recognize then, there were two kings in conflict. There were two evangelions. The Greek word evangelion is where we get “gospel, good news, and glad-tidings.” The evangelion was one who came to herald a message of victory (often political or military in nature). The term can be used to denote the person heralding the message or the message itself.

The real question then, and now, is who has the wisdom and power to authoritatively declare “good news”? There was an evangelion of Jesus Christ and one of Augustus Caesar in the early years of our calendar. The rub, however, came with the fact that both kings demanded undivided allegiance. To believe one evangelion meant the other must be resisted when the two came into conflict. Both kings proclaimed good news, demanded complete allegiance and promised punishment if resisted.

In Acts 4:12, Peter recognized men’s eternal destinies were in jeopardy if anyone were to obey Caesar. So, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he chose the specific words Caesar was using in his evangelion, to apply them to Jesus Christ, “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.” This statement made Peter an enemy of the state. But it was a declaration worth heralding, for God’s honor and men’s souls were at stake.

What is the point then? Let us not forget the King who reigns. For over 2,000 years Jesus Christ, through the power of His evangelion, has been bringing His enemies under His feet. He will continue to do so until He comes in glory to raise His people up with Him. In the end, He wins and so do all those who have their faith in Him alone! Christ’s birthday, not Caesar’s, is celebrated by billions of people across the globe. This year, 2022, marks over two millennia of Christ’s rule. Caesar and his empire were crushed under the power and authority of the King of kings. This should act as a warning to those governments (and individuals) who will not bow the knee to their King Jesus Christ. For those who will not rule righteously and justly, they will “perish” (Ps. 2). As demonstrated by Peter, it is not those men attempting to become God we should fear, but the God who became man. “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mt. 10:28).

There is much to celebrate this Christmas season and to give thanks for. The current rebellion against God in our day will be crushed ... it is promised! “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this” (Is. 9:6-7).

Pastor Eric Schonbachler
Lexington Reformed Baptist Church
www.lexrefbc.org

Carry Generosity to Christmas and Beyond

Advent is upon us! People everywhere are busier than ever with the activities and expectations of the season. What a fun time it can be! We find ourselves shopping for gifts for just about everyone; some out of a sense of obligation, but many out of a pure desire to bless others. This season seems to bring out the generosity in all of us.

But what is generosity? To the Lakota Indians, it’s one of seven values. To them, it means, “To contribute to the well-being of one’s people and all life by sharing and giving freely (The Dreamer, November newsletter of St. Joseph’s Indian school).

That certainly goes beyond things with price tags. We can be generous in other ways, as well. For instance, we can freely share emotions such as sympathy, compassion and kindness. We can be generous with our personal time. The great writer of the 19th century, Ralph Waldo Emerson, expressed it a bit graphically when in his essay, “Gifts,” he wrote, “A gift is a portion of thyself. Thou must bleed for me.” Done any “bleeding” lately?

Sometimes we get so carried away with the spirit of generosity, we forget the reason for the season in the first place. In Isaiah chapter one we read of a people caught up in the excitement and festivity of one of their religious festivals. God says some stark things about their celebration through the prophet Isaiah. In chapter

one verse 11, He says, “I have had enough....” But verse 14 is the real attention-getter. Here God says, “I hate your new moons and prescribed festivals. They have become a burden to me. I am tired of putting up with them.” Wow! When Christmastime rolls around on our calendars, does God think, “Oh no, here we go again?” I hope not. But it’s a thought worth pondering.

God enjoys a good time as much as any of us, but he’s apparently not into empty frivolities from people who do the right things on holy days but forget to be generous the rest of the year. So, enjoy this holiday season to its fullest, include God in every part, and take His generous spirit with you wherever He leads you in the weeks and months to come.

Neva DeMayo-Mahon
Hopeful Saints Ministry

The Greatest Gift Ever Given

When a royal is born, even in our world today, there are great cries of celebration all across the world. The new infant is put on display for all to see and those high enough in the courts may even get to interact with the new royalty.

However, when the greatest King of all existence came into this world, none of the famous and powerful were called to gather to welcome their King. Instead, God brought angels to the meek and lowly shepherds. Shepherds in our world today are commonly known as good, hardworking people. However, back in Jesus’s time, this was not simply the case. They were viewed more as outcasts of society because of their work of caring for the lambs. While everyone else was able to participate in the festivals, the shepherds were given the job that nobody else wanted to do. This reminds me of the scripture from Mark 2:17, “And hearing this, Jesus said to them, ‘It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’”

Though Jesus was not praised by great kings of this world, it’s interesting to see that the first people who were invited to praise our Lord were the very same people who embody the definition of what this scripture paints for us. The shepherds were the ones that tended their lambs, both day and night. It didn’t matter the toll or burden it placed upon the shepherd; caring for his sheep was most important. If a lamb wandered away, they would go for miles to find it and bring it back to the flock.

Jesus, our Lord and Savior, not only came as our King. He came to shepherd us. There are so many who are lost and desperately need to be found. Jesus is in the business of restoring our relationship with God. Christmas is the time in which we stop and praise our Lord for entering into this world, so that the broken-hearted sinner can be redeemed, welcomed into a relationship with God that is free from sin and death, and offered everlasting life.

This Christmas, I encourage everyone to remember the greatest gift ever given, Jesus, our Lord, our Savior, our King, our Good and Faithful Shepherd.

Pastor Quentin Byers
Heppner Christian Church

God is with Us

Merry Christmas

Isaiah 40 is a powerful Old Testament chapter in the Bible and a must-read during the Christmas season.

It begins with, “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.” He later says, “Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded?... The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.”

Isaiah 7:13, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”

Immanuel means, “God with us.” Can you believe it? God came on Christmas morning to be with us... to be with you. In fact, He’s still with us. He still desires to be with everyone in this crazy, mixed-up world.

Isaiah 9:6, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Luke 2:4-7, “Joseph also went up from Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, since he was from the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to him in marriage and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her Child to be born. And she gave birth to her firstborn, a Son. She wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

This Christmas Eve I hope you will find a church to worship the baby Jesus. If you don’t have a home church, ask a friend if you can sit with them at their church. Or know you are welcome to join us a Trinity Lutheran Church, Hermiston, where you can enjoy singing Christmas carols, hear a message of love and hope, participate in Holy Communion (The Lord’s Supper), and end the service with singing Silent Night by candlelight.

Merry Christmas!

See you in church.

Rev. Dr. Pat Hall
Trinity Lutheran Church, Hermiston

Christmas: Time Of Sharing & Caring

As I prepare this message, Heppner is celebrating a program called “Searching for Christ in Christmas.” Immanuel means “God is with us,” and the Babe who was born in Bethlehem two thousand years ago wanted to be with us always. That is the reason He says He is Emmanuel. He wants to be with us to alleviate and take away all our sin and shame. The Gospel of Matthew concludes with, “I am with you always; yes, to the end of time” (Mt. 28:20). He is with us always, as part of our personal life and our family, ready to share all our anxieties, difficulties and problems. I always experience His closeness any time I need Him.

God sent His only Son among us to spread the love, empathy and compassion of the Heavenly Father among the people who were undergoing a terrific time of suffering and shame due to their sins. God became a little Babe bringing peace, joy and happiness to a suffering humanity.

In the Gospel of Luke, we see Mary, immediately after the annunciation, wherein she consents to be the mother of God. She goes out of her way to be with her cousin Elizabeth, to help her, and God calls us to share ourselves with others, not only during the time of Christmas alone, but always and every time when to the least of my brothers, you are doing it for me. I was reminded of the beautiful words of Christ at the last judgement scene: “In truth I tell you, in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me” (Mt. 25:45).

We are called to re-enact the miracle of sharing of the first Christmas. Just as the Father shared His own Son with us and dispelled our gloom, sin, shame and suffering, so, too, we are called to dispel the gloom, suffering, and shame of others. The Church gives us the beautiful example of Mary, who prepared herself for the first Christmas by sharing, by reaching out and being a source of joy to her cousin. We, too, can thus prepare for Christmas by sharing and reaching out to those in need. The miracle of Christmas is the miracle of sharing. I wish you all a merry Christmas and a grace-filled new year of 2023.

Fr. Thankachan Joseph
St. Patrick’s Catholic Church

Christmas is for Seekers

Reflections on Christmas past flood our minds many times in December. No doubt memories of a childhood gift or recollection of an experience as a teenager or young adult percolate up, bubbling into our mind’s eye. One hopes only the positives memories are the ones that replay in our thoughts, but quite often it’s the disappointments that play out in full cinematic color before quickly vanishing as we push them back down, buried as ghosts, unwelcome visitors.

Intense emotions are often sparked, especially as we find ourselves without someone at Christmas who was once dear to us. This spark which sets aflame our sorrow could be rooted in the passing of a spouse, the loss of a father or mother, or simply a friend who is no longer there. We wonder how we will go on without this person. How will we ever fill the void and deep gorge they have left empty inside our heart? Compounded atop these emotions, exasperating our forlorn condition, are shortened days and a barren winter landscape.

When you don’t have many Christmases under your belt, it’s easy to write off such thoughts as the domain of old men or just downright distasteful and contrary to merry cheer and holiday spirit. However, the older a person gets, the more prevalent and visible death and disappointment become. Besides, it doesn’t take an incredibly thoughtful person to just stop and see the tragedy of our human condition.

This past year our community has experienced new births, weddings, opportunities and many things to celebrate. Likewise, we have also suffered losses, some visible, some invisible. One visible loss I can’t help but think about this Christmas is the recent passing of Billy Gentry. Billy was such a likable guy, always telling stories and making people laugh with his humor and smile. This was without a doubt a big part of his identity which came to the fore at his celebration of life service. The hundreds who attended were a testament to the positive influence

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Elks Free Throw Shooting Contest Sunday, December 18th 1:00 p.m. - FREE

A free throw shooting contest for girls and boys ages eight through 13 will be held at the Heppner Elementary School gym on Sunday, Dec. 18 at 1 p.m. Girls and boys must be within that age group as of Apr. 1, 2023 and live in the Heppner, Lexington and lone area. The contest is sponsored by the Heppner Elks and is free for participants. Girls and boys will compete separately in three age groups: 8 to 9 years old, 10 to 11 years old and 12 to 13 years old. Each competitor will shoot 10 free throws, then rest and shoot 15 more, for a total of 25. Winners from each age group will advance to the district Hoop Shoot in Heppner on Jan. 8. For additional information, contact Corey Sweeney at 541-256-0355.



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