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Christmas is for Seekers

he had over so many lives. But there was more to Billy than laughs and stories. There was a deeper part that was easy to overlook if you didn't peer for a closer look. Billy was, like all of us, a person who longed for something deeper and more meaningful. Something that lasts and endures beyond tall tales or careers. Billy sought out God, and just as all before him who sincerely seek God, found God in the man Christ Jesus. I can personally attest to the fact that Billy came to a point and moment in time where he understood who Jesus is. He understood that he needed Jesus, and Billy prayed and believed in heartfelt sincerity that Jesus died for him, and Billy asked Jesus to save him. Simply, completely, Billy gave his life to Jesus.

I tell you this, because I want you to see that you are really not much different from Billy. You, like Billy, may have had a great life. A long life. A wonderful life. But even if your life has not offered you blessings and instead you feel like you have had mostly curses, the truth is that we are all seeking something deeper. We are all seeking answers beyond the here and now. Answers to our hurt and pain. And though we are not promised completely satisfying explanations, we are promised a remedy. That remedy to our hurt and loss is God's promise fulfilled in Jesus that He would come to earth, as a human, live just as we live, experience what we experience and then grow up and willingly die for our sin, our shame and our pain.

This is what Christmas is all about. God with us. God coming to us when we couldn't go to Him. Christmas is for seekers. God is seeking you. How will you respond? Pastor Tripp Finch
Willow Creek Baptist Church

The Scarlet Cord in the Christmas Story

Have you ever wondered why some of the books in the Bible have long lists of names you cannot pronounce that seem to go on forever? Even though we try to avoid reading them, they do serve a purpose.

Whereas most ancient genealogies only traced the male family line and people of Jewish birth, the book of Matthew's genealogy looks much different. His purpose in this was to not only demonstrate the uninterrupted connection between the Israel of the Old Testament, Jesus and His royal lineage, but it included women and Gentiles as well.

The lineage of Jesus Christ is both the plan of God and the fulfillment of a promise made to Abraham. When Abraham showed great faith in the promise of God, God then blessed the whole world through his line.

This Advent season we are reminded that we, too, in Christ alone, are also part of that royal lineage. And because of this, our names are also written in the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

But who is included in the genealogy of Jesus? What kind of people make up His lineage and what does this say about the body of Christ, His Church?

In the ancestry of Jesus, Matthew names Tamar, a widow who seduced her father-in-law in order to seek justice; Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute who helped the Israelites take Jericho; Ruth, a Moabite widow who chose her mother-in-law and Israel's God over her own people; and Bathsheba, a widow whose husband was murdered so King David could take her to be his wife.

By including these women and their life stories, Matthew highlights the difficult and embarrassing stories from Israel's past. We learn that if God could bring healing and restoration through Christ in the lives of these people, He can certainly do the same for us.

Consider Rahab. She lived in Jericho and helped the Israelites in capturing the city by hiding two men who had been sent to scout the city prior to their attack. But her story is not what we think of at this Christmas season. First, she was a woman in a world in where women were often mistreated. She was a prostitute, broken, hurting and bruised—perhaps thinking, "There is no hope for me." Finally, she was a Gentile, a foreigner, raised in a pagan religion. As such, she was despised by the Jews.

Rahab really had nothing going for her and nothing to look forward to. But the book of Joshua shows the point of change or conversion in Rahab's life. Joshua 2:9-13 tells us that she and all the people of Jericho had heard stories about how God had delivered His people through the Red Sea and how he had given them victory over their enemies.

Rahab knew enough to know that the God of the Israelites was the one true God. Her faith caused her to welcome the spies and then send them on their way. And her faith caused her to hang the scarlet cord out of her window. When it came time to choose sides, she chose to side with God's people.

For more than 2000 years Rahab's story has taught us that no one is beyond the reach of God's grace. Even in the midst of judgment, God reaches out and saves a prostitute who turns to him in faith. God delights to save notorious sinners. So let every sinner take heart and come running to Jesus.

At the time of year we celebrate Advent and Christmas, the lights in our homes are lit with bright colors, the scent of pine trees and holiday candles fill our homes and beautifully-wrapped presents are under the tree. The house is filled with laughter, fun and the smells of cookies, roasts and other holiday delicacies.

The Church is decorated and the scent of candles and their glow bring warmth to our hearts and memories. We may be wearing our new clothes, and the kids are in the children's Christmas program.

So why this story? Why do we read of such people whose lives were a mess? Adulterers, murderers, prostitutes and deceivers. Is this part of the Advent and Christmas story? It is, if you really pay attention to God's Word. This is what the world was waiting for. The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. Hope was born for the lost and hurting.

Before you came to Jesus Christ, what stories from your past were difficult to tell? What are the things you would prefer to edit out of your family history? Like those named in Jesus' human lineage, we are also a people

who are an absolute mess, rescued by God who wants all people who put their hope in Him.

The Advent, or time for waiting, is over. Jesus Christ came as that Child, the Light of the World, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace and Wonderful Counselor, so that those in darkness could be changed when they trust and follow Him.

This Child was born so that we would also be born-again! To truly understand Advent is to realize the waiting is over and has resulted in a change in us. Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new (2 Cor. 5:17). If a change has not happened in you, then it's just a nice holiday story we tell every year, and you are still lost in sin.

The waiting is over. Welcome the Christ in your life and heart. Amen.

Dr. Carmelo Di Salvo
Valby Lutheran church

Christmas: Time to sing glory to God

Advent has been an intense preparation for the birthday of Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem, which means "the house of bread," to become bread for all of us. He was a beautiful example to everyone. At the threshold of Christmas, are we ready to welcome Him into our homes and into our personal lives? As for yourself, "What else do I need to do to welcome Him into my individual life?"

The reading from Isaiah 9:1-6 begins like this: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone." On the first Sunday of Advent, we were reminded to "let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day..." (Rom. 13:12). From the time Abraham, our father in faith, was called by the Lord to set out, to go forth from his homeland to an unknown region that God would show him, our identity as believers has been that of a people making its pilgrim way towards the promised land. He accompanies us all through this life-journey. He is ever faithful to His covenant, though we are not. He accompanies our journey as "God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all" (1 Jn. 1:5). Yet people experience times of both light and darkness, fidelity and infidelity, obedience and rebellion; times of being a pilgrim people and times of being a people adrift.

If we love God and our brothers and sisters, we walk in the light; in contrast, if we keep our hearts closed, if we are dominated by pride, deceit, self-seeking, lust, drunkenness, rivalry, jealousy and envy, darkness falls within and around us. "Whoever hates his brother," writes the Apostle John, "is in the darkness; he walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has blinded his eyes" (1 Jn. 2:11). The Babe of Bethlehem comes as the source of grace and rays of love from the Heavenly Father, to take us to His abode.

The Gospel reading from Luke (2:1-14), speaks of the deeper meaning and purpose of Christ's birth. God became a baby, not a superhero or an emperor, because Christmas is all about love. God gave Himself totally out of love for humanity. God sacrifices His own nature to become one like us, to make us understand the true meaning of love and that loving, giving, and sharing is not limited to the season of Christmas. All that is opposed to these and simplicity—namely selfishness, greed, anger, jealousy and pride—are the root causes for disharmony, conflict, hatred, violence and absence of peace (at the personal, social and global levels). Where there is genuine love and simplicity there is peace.

Christmas is a reminder for each of us that we are all the innkeepers who decide if there is some room for Jesus or not. The real meaning of Christmas is when we spiritually prepare ourselves to receive the Babe of Bethlehem in our hearts through the acts of sacrifices, mortifications and kindness. Christmas is not only putting up decorations in front of our houses, preparing a Christmas tree, and packing Christmas gifts under the Christmas tree. We need to make time for reaching out to others in their great need, to spend time with our aging parents and grandparents, to examine the real meaning of Christmas. Jesus was born in manger, but he became all things to all people and quenched their hunger for the divine. We can prepare a fabulous manger in our personal lives through works of kindness and sacrifices, and become all things to all people around us. That is the real meaning of Christmas I feel. So, we, too, join the angels of God to sing glories to God in the highest.

Fr. Joseph

County commissioners hear update on Ione gas station

By Andrea Di Salvo

At a short meeting on Dec. 20, the Morrow County Board of Commissioners heard an update from commissioner Melissa Lindsay regarding work on the abandoned gas station in Ione.

At a previous meeting, Lindsay had informed the county commission that the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) was taking on the decommissioning of the old gas station on Main Street in Ione as part of the government's brownfield project funding.

Tuesday Lindsay told the board that she, General Maintenance Supervisor Tony Clement and Public Works Director Eric Imes had met at the site with the contractor and DEQ to discuss continuing scope of work.

"It's pretty exciting, all the work that they're going to do on this brownfield grant," said Lindsay. "I think it's going to be a really great project."

Lindsay said that Clement and Imes were "well looped in" and are prepared to see the project through to completion. Russell verified that someone in the public works department would monitor the project next year to make sure it continued to move forward. Imes said he would be in charge of that.

"It's a great project,

trying to get that cleaned up and back refreshed in the town there," said Doherty. "Make some use of that space again, certainly."

Lindsay reiterated to the board that the only thing the DEQ wasn't willing to deal with was replacing asphalt. The property sits on the corner of two streets, one of which is Ione Main Street. Lindsay said she didn't foresee a problem, but that Imes was aware of the caveat. As far as the property itself, replacing the existing asphalt wasn't a priority.

"The asphalt that's on the property is just really old and degraded and crumbled," said Imes. "There's nothing there worth saving."

Lindsay also wanted to inform the other commissioners that DEQ was decommissioning two regulated and two unregulated underground fuel tanks, as well as one heating oil tank, which she thought the board may not have been aware of.

"This is a really good program," said Russell. "Before the federal and state government had this program, when these sites went back for foreclosure, oftentimes the counties didn't foreclose on them; it just became an abandoned site because nobody wanted to touch the tar baby."

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