

Christmas Messages From Area Churches

A Home in God’s Heart

Many of us remember this season’s song, “I’ll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams.”

The desire to be with family and friends in familiar places doing familiar holiday things is the longing this song expresses. Some people can count on this feeling of coming home to be wrapped up in the cozy blanket of all that this season has come to offer. Others are separated by distance and circumstances that make this a wistful dream. And still others feel the absence of all of this and the emptiness that comes from being on the outside looking in.

There is in all of us a deep yearning for a home. What a comfort it would be if, regardless of circumstances, everyone could hold this feeling of being home in their hearts. As it turns out, that is exactly what Christmas is about.

At one point in history, God came to make a home among us. This is Christmas—the birthday of Jesus. As He lived with us, Jesus opened the heart of God to us as our true home. To all of us, everywhere and at all times, God is saying, “I have loved you with an everlasting love, and so with lovingkindness I will draw you to Me” (Jeremiah 31:3). This is the dream that was born on Christmas day. This is the gift that wraps us in the comfort of being at home in God’s heart.

Peace and comfort to us all,
Pastor Joann Dickson
Hopeful Saints
460 Gale St., Heppner
541-676-9970
Christmas Eve Service at 6 p.m.

Sunday services at 10 a.m.; Wednesday evening study/discussion at 6 p.m.

The Death March

Mark records for us in His gospel, Jesus saying these words to His disciples, “The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise again three days later” (Mk. 9:31).

Now, you might read that and wonder, “What in the world does that have to do with Christmas? That seems like a verse for Easter.” Well, what is important to see in this text (which is a bit hidden in the English translation) is this word “delivered.” The specific word Mark uses here, in the Greek, has a futuristic sense to it, but also one conveying fact. It is to say, “It is certain this will take place in the future.”

You see, Jesus was needing to bring clarity to His disciples about how He would usher in His kingdom. It would not be (as they were incorrectly thinking) with military force. No. He was going to crush humanity’s greatest enemies—sin, Satan, and death—through His sufferings on the cross. He was telling them, that was where He was heading. He was, so to speak, on a death march.

The relevance to Christmas is to understand this death march did not begin on that day when Jesus “set His face like a flint” (Is. 50:7) to Jerusalem where He was to be crucified. No. It began when the Son of God condescended and took on human flesh. It began at His incarnation. As there would be a cry in His

voice when He was born, so there would be a cry in His voice at His death. He would cry out, “It is finished!” (Jn. 19:30), as if to convey mankind’s greatest enemies had just received a death blow. He proved this by rising from the grave. He ascended in glory and was exalted above every name, in heaven and on earth. The important point to make is His path to exaltation began in His humiliation.

Christmas is a wonderful season to remember our Savior coming into the world as the Light that shines in the darkness (Jn. 1:5). It is right to pause to remember the wonder of God becoming man—the hope of the world lying helpless in a manger. But it is equally important to remember the purpose to which He came. He could have come with a sword. He could have come and demanded all to serve Him. He is the rightful King of creation. He could have done that. Instead, He came to serve. He came to be “delivered into the hands of men” so that they might “kill Him.” He came to give His life as a ransom for many (Mk. 10:45).

We all, in a sense, are on a death march like Jesus Christ. Not in that we are heading to a cross to die for sinners, but that we are moving to our death bed. You are not promised tomorrow. While today is called today, cry out to God that He might save you of your sins. Look to the cross of Christ as your only hope of salvation. There is no other way. Jesus was born to die. So were you. The question is, “Will you looked to the finished work of Christ to be delivered from your sin, or will you be delivered into the depths of hell for your refusal to accept God’s gracious gift?”

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

The Insignificant Becomes Significant

In a world of notables and influencers it is easy to feel left behind. Most of us spend our lives quietly going about our business, going to school, working our job, raising a family, babysitting grandchildren, or just living life. TIME magazine is not likely to declare any of us person of the year anytime soon.

And while we may feign a lack of care for such notoriety, upon reflection, the idea of being passed over can be distressing. Further still, not only are we very often ignored, we may be powerless to change that or anything about the world despite being told the contrary from a very young age.

Perhaps even more disturbing is the thought that even when it comes to the small details of our lives, we have little control over anything when it comes down to it. We can make schedules or plan meals and vacations, but everything is subject to be disrupted at any moment by a call from the doctor or unexpected news from an employer, family member or friend.

What can be done in the face of such despairing odds?

Many years ago, a young, unassuming, insignificant teenage girl in a small town received news

that shook her world to the core. No one knew her name except her family, her rabbi, and her friends. Like us, she too made plans, which included marrying well, living a quiet life in a small town, raising a family, and hopefully being left alone. That was not to be. Her designs would be altered in ways that would literally change the world forever.

If you haven’t already guessed, that young woman was named Mary. In the Bible in Luke, chapter 1, something astonishing happens. Out of all the people in the world at that time (emperors, priests, the wealthy, etc.) God chose Mary to be the mother of the Son of God. She had no notable education or wealth. No social media followers. No political power. No voice whatsoever. A nobody who would become somebody because God looked down into a small town and chose her.

And you want to know the most powerful aspect of this story? Mary did not have to be anything to be used by a God who is everything. She did not cause any of what happened. She had no ability to complete the miracle of the virgin birth, yet God did the impossible in her life. If God could change the world through a nobody like Mary, couldn’t He also do the impossible in your life?

In God’s economy, more often than not, it is not the Presidents, CEOs or Caesars through which He moves and works. It is the forgotten people in forgotten towns, the discarded and passed over. Those are the ones through whom He changes the world.

The next time you despair becoming aware of your seemingly small significance, remember Mary, but even more so, remember God’s preference to choose the nobodies to be the somebodies.

Candlelight Christmas Eve Service at 5:30 p.m.

Worship Service every Sunday at 10 a.m. or live at <https://www.facebook.com/wcbcheppner>

By the way, isn’t it interesting that even though a literal angel is appearing before Mary and telling her these things, that it is the proof of God’s working in Elizabeth’s life, another human being, that convinces and comforts Mary.

There is a sermon right there.

Pastor Tripp Finch
Willow Creek Baptist Church
560 Minor Street, Heppner

Rediscovering Christmas at the Ione Community Church

Have you noticed how Christmas seems to come faster every year? For kids, it’s all about the countdown to presents and cookies. For adults, it might feel more like a rush of shopping, decorating and figuring out whose turn it is to host dinner.

In all the busyness of the season, how often do we ever stop to think about what we’re really counting down to?

At the Ione Community Church, we’ve spent the last few weeks rediscovering Christmas, diving into what this season truly means, and here’s the spoiler: it’s about way more than presents and tinsel. It’s about hope

when life feels uncertain; peace in the chaos; joy, even when it’s hard; and love that brings us together.

Let’s be honest—life in our country has been a bit “messy” lately. Yet Christmas reminds us of a hope so steady it doesn’t depend on our circumstances. The story of Simeon and Anna, two people who spent their whole lives waiting to meet the promised Savior, teaches us that hope isn’t about ignoring reality—it’s about trusting in the reality of something far greater than ourselves.

We’ve all had those moments when life feels like a never-ending to-do list or a storm we can’t control. But Christmas introduces us to the Prince of Peace. That peace doesn’t mean life gets easy; it means we don’t have to face the storm alone.

Happiness can be as unpredictable as the weather, but joy? That’s something deeper. Mary, the mother of Jesus, and her cousin, Elizabeth, found joy amidst challenging circumstances because they saw God at work. Joy is about knowing that, no matter what, we’re part of something bigger.

Here’s the best part of the Christmas story—it’s for everyone. God didn’t just send Jesus for a select few; He sent Him for shepherds and kings, for the religious and the outcasts, for you and me. It’s a love that crosses every barrier and brings us together.

This Christmas, I invite you to take a moment to breathe and rediscover these gifts of hope, peace, joy and love. If you don’t already have a church home/family of faith holding a Christmas Eve service this year, please know you’re invited to join us in celebrating this amazing story at our Candlelit Christmas Eve Service, Dec. 24 at 7 p.m. at the Ione Community Church, 395 East Main Street, Ione. Whether you’re curious, searching, or just need a break from the holiday frenzy, come as you are.

Bring a friend, a neighbor, or even your great-aunt who makes “questionable” fruitcake. There’s room for everyone.

All are welcome, so bring a friend!
Pastor Jeff Clabaugh
Ione Community Church

Christmas is the miracle of sharing and reaching out

As we come closer to Christmas, we might sometimes feel that if only we had been there when Christ

was born, we would have been so fortunate. For that matter, there are times when we are overwhelmed with doubts and wish we could see God and be reassured in our faith.

So, this Sunday’s responsorial Psalm puts words to our plea: “Lord make us turn to you; Lord let us see your face and we shall be saved.” The Lord is coming. Are we ready to see him, to meet him, to hear him?

Today’s reading is from the prophet Micah (5:1-4a). A contemporary of Isaiah, Amos, and Hosea, he preached the usual message of repentance, asking the people to turn away from their sins. Micah came from the small village of Bethlehem. In today’s reading, Micah reminds the people that the Messiah will not come from the sophisticated, well-known city of Jerusalem.

Its people were too hardened, and their kings had been oppressing the people. The present kings were no good. He points out that the Messiah will come from the small town of Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem.

“Oh Bethlehem, you who are one of the little clans of Judea, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule Israel.”

The name Bethlehem means “house of bread.” This town had no importance at that time but it had ancient ties to the dynasty of Jesse and his son David. Micah made the great promise of God to His people. Between that promise and its fulfillment there was a long time of waiting. Only those who waited in hope saw that promise fulfilled.

As believers, we want to draw close to God, we want to experience God and we pray that we might encounter Him. We have our expectations of how God should come into our lives but God has His own way.

That he will come into our world is certain, but will we encounter him? Perhaps we must abandon our “Jerusalem” and look for little, unknown Bethlehem; abandon our plans and wait in hope for His coming. Have we seen Jesus on the streets where we live? Perhaps he does live there. Only with eyes of faith can we recognize Him.

In the Gospel of Luke (1:39-45) we read of the visit of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth in a remote village in Judea, to be of assistance to her in her pregnancy. It is through Mary that God kept the promise announced a long time ago through the prophet Micah. Important is not only the fact that God came

into her life but that she recognized His coming.

As Mary enters Elizabeth’s house, Elizabeth beholds with eyes of faith the coming of the Lord into her life. Though Mary could just be a younger cousin on a social visit that happens to come at the right time to help Elizabeth, Elizabeth sees God’s hand and the Lord’s presence in what is happening.

“Why has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord comes to me?”

At Christmas God keeps His promise; that promise is named Jesus. That promise is revealed to all who have faith and fulfilled in all who have love. We will only recognize the face of Jesus when we have love in our hearts, love for God and love for our neighbor.

However, so often we act insensitively towards those of our own home and neighborhood. We might look for God in the high and mighty, yet He might be hidden in the small, the sick, the senile, the simple and the social outcasts.

On Christmas we remember the magnanimity of God, who shared His only son with humanity, a little babe bringing peace, joy and happiness to a suffering humanity.

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, especially as the world faces threat of war and political supremacies are taking an upper hand.

For this we have a beautiful example in Mary, who reaches out to the needy of her time, who prepared herself for the first Christmas by sharing her joy with her cousin Elizabeth.

We, too, can thus prepare for Christmas, by sharing with those in need, as the miracle of Christmas is the miracle of sharing and reaching out.

Father Thankachan Joseph
St. Patrick and St. William Catholic parishes

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