

The Why of Christmas

First Sunday After Christmas

Rev. Ian K. Johnston -

Micah 5: 2-4; I John 2: 7-10

St. John's Presbyterian Church

December 30, 2018

Cornwall, ON

Christmas is one of the most important times of the year and it is also one of the most emotional times. The majority of us get caught up in buying and giving, communicating by card, phone or email, and perhaps visiting, travelling and eating together. But there are many in our modern Canada who do not know why we celebrate Christmas, and this stands out no less clear than in the newest Government of Canada Mint advertising its wares that were available for the, *Season of Giving* and, "*Gifts for Holiday Giving.*" I believe that the majority of Canadians know Christmas is the birthday of Jesus but there are many who might be hard pressed to say what significance Christ or Christmas has in their lives.

This is the First Sunday after Christmas, for many of us, we are still in the Christmas Season or Christmas-tide, the week before Epiphany, so I take this opportunity to present you with this question: *What is the purpose of Christmas?*

I think we must remember simply. The first purpose of Christmas is to remember the birth of Jesus, and the reason He was born was to show us what God is like. We have many glimpses, glints and glimmerings of God, some recorded throughout the Old Testament; some resting in our imaginations; some occurring around us in nature, industry and human relations. But until Jesus was born, we had no definitive picture of God the Creator and Sustainer, in terms that we could understand. God came among us in the person of His Son, Jesus our Lord, to display Himself in understandable human terms. All that we can understand of God is displayed in Jesus. God reduced Himself and adapted Himself into terms we could identify with by focussing Himself in the human Jesus. It is significant that we do not have a photograph of Jesus. Instead we have words about Jesus and those words tell us that Jesus was the Word. Words express our thoughts and our feelings, and the Bible teaches us that Jesus expresses the mind, the purpose and the personality of God. If you want to know what God is like, look to Jesus, that is why He came.

A second purpose of Christmas and a second reason why Jesus was born was to remind us that God is with us. One of the titles ascribed to Him is, *Emmanuel - God with us*. God also revealed Himself to be with His people in many other ways. He was with His people at the Exodus when the Israelites were led to freedom from their slavery in Egypt. God was with them as they struggled to find their way to the promised land. Even when the people were taken away in exile from their homes and loved ones, God was with them encouraging and supporting them, and sustaining them. God was with His people in the personalities of the great leaders, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon and Elijah, but each of those men was flawed. Each one of those men died never to return. But Jesus in His maturity, love and perfection, came to us even when we did our worst and murdered Him, He overcame death and returned to be with us, alive forever more. Jesus, born, resurrected and always alive, is with us now and is our reminder that nothing can ever separate us from God. He is with us. This Good News has sustained countless throngs of people throughout their lives and not just at Christmas. The oppressed, the suffering, the dying have hope because He is God with us. In Jesus, God came to live our life, to die our death and to grant us new everlasting life. The Good News of Christmas is that God is with us.

A third purpose of Christmas and a third reason why Jesus was born was to encourage us with the Good News that God has not given up on us. For many years and ever since I was in High School, we have heard speculations of the end of the world. We can imagine that humanity can destroy itself and our world with bombs or poisons or diseases. Ordinary people have been worried and have shared conversations wondering if peace will ever reign across the earth. Many people have

expressed feelings of depression as they consider the state of the world on every continent and even in our own community. There is the continuing war on terrorism; the continued wars in the Middle East; suicide bombers; violence between races and tribes; the resurgence of AIDS; guns on our streets that keep appearing just like the drugs with no apparent way to curb them; pollution of our waters and the scare of chemical warfare. The words of an old Christmas carol speak to our situation:

*But with the woes of sin and strife  
The world has suffered long;  
Beneath the angel strain have rolled  
Two thousand years of wrong,  
And man, at war with man, hears not  
The love-song which they bring,  
O hush the noise, you men of strife,  
And hear the angels sing.*

We all wish the people of strife would hush and listen to God and behold the Good News of His Son. I have no hope to offer you through politics, economics, sociology, psychology or even religion. The systems and “isms” and “ologies” of our humanity have failed terribly and I have no hope they will succeed any better in the future than in the past. But I have great hope and I am encouraged, and I am confident, because of Christmas. I am reminded annually by Christmas that God has not given up on us or our world. We may write ourselves off and we may figure all is lost but as Christians we do not place our trust in humankind or in the inventions of human beings. We place our trust solely in God. We believe in God. We believe that God cares for His world and His people so much that He sent His only Son to us. *FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM MIGHT NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.* My friends, that is encouraging and that is hopeful and that is the Good News of Christmas. God has not given up on us, and He loves us, and He came to our earth to let us know. He died for us and overcame death for us. He is with us during the Christmas season and beyond, here and now. Hear His words of comfort and assurance: *I SHALL BE WITH YOU ALWAYS UNTIL THE END OF THE AGE, and, WHERE EVER TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED IN MY NAME, I SHALL BE IN THEIR MIDST.*

Today, as we continue to celebrate Christmas-tide and move towards the season of Epiphany, this is an opportunity to refresh our memory of the birth of Baby Jesus, a special baby it is true, but then every baby is special to God. And every baby that is born, is God’s reminder to us of Jesus and His affirmation that He has not given up on us. We have a future, we have a purpose and we have love, all from God.

What is Christmas all about? It is about Jesus coming to us.

Why did Jesus come to us? Jesus came to show us what God is like; He came to remind us God is with us; He came to encourage us by showing us that God has not given up on us, that He loves us. That is the purpose of Christmas. This is the Good News for this great, annual Christian festival.

May God bless you and your loved ones with Joy and Blessed Assurance. My prayer is that there will be Peace on earth, in your heart and in your home. Happy New Year.  
Amen.