

Sermon (2) for December 24, 2017 – “The Reality of Christmas

Christmas Eve (Evening Service), Year B – Texts: Isaiah 9:2-7, Luke 2:1-20

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A question's been on my mind these last few weeks. So, I want to ask, Does Christmas change us? Our world? Think about that for just a minute. Will things be different on December 26th? How about January 18th, February 12th, or June 3rd? Will those days, or any other in the coming year, be any different because of Christmas? Will we be happier? Will we have more peace in our lives? Will we be better people? Or will we simply have more things, and additional strain on already tight budgets? If we're completely honest Christmas doesn't really change our world (or us) all that much, if at all, even for those of us who consider ourselves Christian. Largely, we celebrate Christmas as a great American holiday. Santa, reindeer, holly and mistletoe, family and friends gathered around the fireplace remembering what Christmas was like when we were kids. The shopping, the parties, all the activities that we cram into the season are a part of how Christmas goes. But when everything is said and done the only real change Christmas brings to our world is that it makes us a little bit poorer and a lot more tired. And, all of this for an event that God never called us to commemorate. It's true. Not once in the Bible are we asked to remember the birth of Christ. His death – yes...His birth – no. Thus, our celebration of Christmas is a purely human endeavor.

It's not a bad thing, mind you. In fact, it can be quite a good thing. Still, the question remains, does it change us? It should, because the purpose of Christmas, the whole reason that Christ was born, why He took on human flesh, was to bring a change to our world. But there can be no change in the world if there is no change in each and every one of our personal worlds; those places where we carry out life on a day to day basis, our job, our relationships, our family life, our faith or, if you prefer, our spirituality. There can be no change in the world if there is no change in **us**.

When the angels announced the birth of Christ they said...“**Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you...You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.**” The angels tell us that the arrival of Christ in our world, that is Christmas, is to be joyful. It should be something that helps quell our fears and it should be something that brings us hope, peace, love and joy. But does it? Does it bring any of these things in any great or lasting measure? Does it change us? My guess is that most people would say no. But it should. All of us need and long for that which Christmas brings and is supposed to be all about. But we often aren't looking in the right places if we haven't given up looking altogether. Too many people aren't living their lives. Too many people just exist. It's sad. But, what's even sadder? The fact that for some people, Christmas at least in the way that they celebrate it, only leads to a heightened sense of hopelessness. I've heard it said that sin happens when we believe the lie that God doesn't love us anymore, when we believe ourselves unloved and unlovable. The truth of Christmas stands over and against that lie.

Still, the reality of the birth of the Christ child stands not simply as a reminder of God's love and grace, but of the **depth** of that love and grace and the lengths to which God would go to save His people!

And so, brothers and sisters here's the thing. It's not through the gifts or the memories made. It's not through the time spent with family. It's not through any of the trappings of the holiday. Christmas – as we celebrate it doesn't change anything. The change comes in the birth of the Savior of the world who is Christ the Lord! From His birth to His death and resurrection, Jesus changes everything in our world. This is good news indeed. This is **very** good news! This is, in fact, the best possible news. But, only if we allow news of the Savior's birth to change us! If we will only prepare Him room in our hearts! But it doesn't stop there. It mustn't. You see, it's not enough to simply believe. It's not enough to follow the star and come to pay homage. It's not enough to worship with our lips. It isn't even enough to bring Him our gifts. Yes, it's true that God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name. It's true that every knee will bend in heaven, on earth and under it, and every tongue should confess that He is Lord. But it's not enough! Because, you see, the shadow of the cross looms over the stable.

The baby will not remain in that manger. We know this. He will grow and live and teach and heal and feed and He will eventually suffer and die. And we're eventually going to need to get up off our knees. We're going to need to stop **worshipping** Him long enough to start **following** Him! We're going to need to bring Him all that we are and all we could ever hope to be. Why? Because for everyone who does, for every single person on earth who turns to Jesus in faith, picks up their cross and follows Him, new life is theirs. Hope, joy, and peace is renewed. Death becomes merely a door to life, new and eternal. The reality of Christmas that the Messiah, our Messiah, came in a most unexpected way. Not as a warrior, or a king. He brought no gifts, He was the gift!

So then, in answer to my original question: "Does Christmas change anything?" The answer is, of course, **no**. Christmas in and of itself changes **nothing**, but it is in fact, Jesus who changes **everything**!

Joy to the World indeed!

Maranatha!

Come, Lord Jesus!

Amen and amen.