

December 24, 2019

Rediscovering Christmas

The Incarnation...

John 1:1-14

Opening Words: Did you know, according to the National Retail Association, the average American spent \$633 on Christmas this year? That figure is down from last year's figure of \$708. This is how the \$633 figure breaks down:

Buying gifts represented 54% of the total (\$341.82)

Christmas Travel represents 21% of the total (\$132.93)

Miscellaneous Expenses represents 14% of the total (\$88.62)

Decorating Expenses represents 11% of the total (\$69.63)

22% of Americans are planning to go into debt this Christmas. How much did you spend this Christmas? If you agree Christmas is the most expensive time of the year say, "**Merry Christmas!**"

This is the final sermon in my five-part sermon series, *Rediscovering Christmas*. In this sermon series I have been reminding you Christmas is not just a secular holiday. Christmas is a religious holiday. Christmas is not about Santa Baby. Christmas is about the baby Jesus, who was the incarnation of God. Our second Gospel lesson for this evening is John 1:1-14. Let me call this message *The Incarnation*.

John 1:1-14 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning.

3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

6 There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. 9 The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

It has been said, "*The beauty of Christmas is not in the presents but in His presence.*" That is a great quote for this sacred evening. If you agree say, "**Amen!**"

I love the story of J. Edgar Hoover (1895-1972), who ran the FBI for years. No one

questioned his authority, so his subordinates were on the lookout for ways to impress him. A young FBI agent was put in charge of office supplies. Trying to cut costs and impress his boss, he reduced the size of the office memo paper. One of the new memo sheets soon ended up on Hoover's desk. Hoover took one look at it, determined he didn't like the size of the margins on the paper, and quickly scribbled on the memo, "Watch the borders!" The memo was passed on through the office. For the next six weeks, it became nearly impossible to enter the United States from Mexico or Canada. The FBI was watching the borders. I tell you that story to make one simple point: communicating can be a complex thing.

Have you ever stopped to consider all the ways in which we have to communicate in our time? Like J. Edgar Hoover, you can write a simple note on a scrap piece of paper. You could write a formal letter on a piece of stationery. You can pick up your land line phone and call a loved one or business associate. You pick up your cell phone and call a fringe person in your life as you drive home from work or travel down the interstate. You can email a friend. You can rent a billboard. You can face time someone or communicate with them on Facebook. I could go on, but I won't. You get the point. There are more ways to communicate today than any other time in world history. However, this is also true. There are more ways to be misunderstood today than any other time in world. Do you know Brinkley's Law? It says, "If there is any way it can be misunderstood--by someone, somewhere, sometime--it will be misunderstood." When was the last time you were misunderstood trying to communicate? Perhaps, that is the reason God came into the world, taking the form of a human. The best kind of communication is still talking face to face.

This is Christmas Eve and on Christmas Eve we ponder the wonder of the incarnation of God. Just ponder that theological point for a moment. God left the perfection of heaven to enter this imperfect world. It is more than the human mind can handle. Augustine said the incarnation of God is beyond all human understanding. But perhaps one of the reasons he came into the world was to communicate with us. He didn't want there to be any misunderstanding, so he came into the world to communicate with us face to face. This evening I want to talk about three things that God wants to communicate to us. They are three great revelations that are grounded in basic Christian theology. Each one is important to the spiritual maturity. My goal is to help you have a better understanding of God and a greater appreciation of God's plan for you in this world. So if you are ready to discover the three great divine revelations God has for you in his incarnation say, "**Amen!**" I will be quick. I know you have eggnog and fruit cake waiting at home.

First, the incarnation reveals the heart of God. The great Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) told the story of a prince who was running an errand for his father one day in the local village. As he did so, he passed through a very poor section of the town. Looking through the window of his carriage, he saw a beautiful young peasant girl walking along the street. He could not get her off his heart. He continued

to come to the town, day after day, just to see her and to feel as though he was near her. His heart yearned for her, but there was a problem. How could he develop a relationship with her? He could order her to marry him. It was within his powers to do so. But he wanted this girl to love him from the heart, willingly. He could put on his royal garments and impress her with his regal entourage and drive up to her front door with soldiers and a carriage drawn by six horses. But if he did that, he would never be certain that the girl loved him or was simply overwhelmed with his power, position and wealth. The prince came up with another solution. He moved into the village dressed only as a peasant. He lived among the people, shared their interests and concerns, and talked their language. In time, the young peasant girl grew to know him, and then to love him. That is the story of Christmas!

John 3:16-17 says, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."* God came into the world to tell us that he loves you and me! The incarnation reveals to us the very heart of God. The God of the universe is in love with us! He could have impressed us with his power. He could have ordered us to love him. But God entered this world to share our interests and concerns to win our hearts. The incarnation reveals the heart of God. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

Second, the incarnation reveals our greatest human need. They tell me sitting majestically atop the highest hill in Toledo, Spain, is the Alcazar, a 16th-century fortress. In the civil war of the 1930's, the Alcazar became a battleground when the Loyalists tried to oust the Nationalists, who held the fortress. During one dramatic episode of the war, the Nationalist leader received a phone call while in his office at the Alcazar. It was from his son, who had been captured by the Loyalists. They gave the son an ultimatum to deliver to his father. If the father didn't surrender the Alcazar to them, they would kill his son. The father weighed his options. After a long pause and with a heavy heart, he said to his son, "Then die like a man." Let there be no doubt about it. Jesus died like a man.

Romans 5:8 says, *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* God understands our greatest need was for a savior. Do you remember these words?

*If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator;
If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist;
If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist;
If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer;
But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior."*

It is impossible to separate the baby in the nativity from the Savior on the cross thirty-three years later. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for our sins. He died so we could live.

The incarnation reveals our greatest human need, forgiveness. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

Third, the incarnation reveals the mystery of God's plan. The Hebrew world waited for generations for the Messiah. They knew he is going to be something special! They dreamed of his greatest, but they almost missed him because he was quite common. The story of the nativity is filled with common people. The announcement is given to common laborers in the fields, who their orthodox leaders had rejected, the shepherds. When the Messiah is born, he is entrusted to a common couple, Mary and Joseph. Two years later, when the Magi appeared, they go to the palace because the child was a king. They find him in the barn. The mystery of God's plan is that it is entrusted to common people like you and me.

1 Timothy 3:16 says, "*Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.*" From the very beginning God's plan to save the world had been a mystery. It is impossible to understand God's ways. The incarnation reveals the mystery of God's plan. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

Cecil B. DeMille (1881-1959) was making one of his great epic movies. He had six cameras at various points to pick up the overall action and five other cameras set up to film plot developments involving the major characters. The large cast had begun rehearsing their scene at 6 a.m. They went through it four times and now it was late afternoon. The sun was setting and there was just enough light to get the shot done. DeMille looked over the panorama, saw that all was right, and gave the command for action. One hundred extras charged up the hill; another hundred came storming down the same hill to do mock battle. In another location Roman centurions lashed and shouted at two hundred slaves who labored to move a huge stone monument toward its resting place. Meanwhile the principal characters acted out, in close-up, their reactions to the battle on the hill. It took fifteen minutes to complete the scene. When it was over, DeMille yelled, "Cut!" and turned to his assistant, all smiles. "That was great!" he said. "It was, C.B.," the assistant yelled back. "It was fantastic! Everything went off perfectly!" Enormously pleased, DeMille turned to face the head of his camera crew to find out if all the cameras had picked up what they had been assigned to film. He waved to the camera crew supervisor. From the top of the hill, the camera supervisor waved back, raised his megaphone, and called out, "Ready when you are, C.B.!" The communication was poor. They hadn't filmed a single thing!

Don't let that story be your Christmas. It has been a wonderful scene. There has been the colored lights and the holiday decorations. There has been the cards and gifts. There is one at home waiting for you. There has been special music and parties. It has been fantastic but don't miss what God is trying to tell you. Christmas is not just about the birth of a baby that came into the world two thousand years ago. It is about God,

himself, taking a human form to experience all that we experience. He came to make sure there was no miscommunication. He came to reveal his heart. He came to reveal his plan. He came to reveal our great need. This is Christmas Eve! Let the party begin! Do you remember the opening quote? *"The beauty of Christmas is not in the presents but in His presence."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**