

Christmas Eve 2020
The Deeper Side of Christmas
Luke 2:1-14

Opening words: We live in politically correct times. Nothing emphasizes that more than the phrase Happy Holidays. What holidays are included in Happy Holidays? It includes Christmas, New Year's Day, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa. Some also include Thanksgiving. We are supposed to say Happy Holidays, so no one offended. Happy Holidays offends me, and it demotes Christmas. I am not alone. Did you know, according to the USA Today, in 2018, only 31% of all Americans preferred Happy Holidays over Merry Christmas. We are here this evening to celebrate the great day of Christmas, a Christian holiday. It is the day we remember the birth of Jesus; the day God took human form and entered this world. It was all part of God's plan of salvation for the world. Our reading is traditional, Luke 2:1-14. Let me call this message *The Deeper Side of Christmas*.

Luke 2:1-14 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

3 And everyone went to their own town to register.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,

7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

It all began in the year 336. That is the first recorded date of Christmas being on December 25, during the reign Roman Emperor Constantine, who was the first Christian Emperor. There are many different theories or traditions as to why that date was selected. This is the one that I find most interesting. The early church believed Mary conceived Jesus on March 25. (The early church also believed Jesus died on the cross on March 25.) Nine months after March 25 is December 25, Christmas, the day we celebrate the birth of Jesus. That date stuck. It is safe to say the western world has embraced Christmas. Each country has their own traditions to embrace the day. America is no different. I do not know of anyone who does not love Christmas.

Several weeks ago, I was up late and googled the question, why do we love Christmas? I came up with several thousand websites. The website I chose was called "why Christmas." It had an article called Twelve Reasons I Love Christmas. This is their list. I cannot disagree with a one.

- 1. Christmas Decorations:** I like looking at Christmas decorations. According to the National Retail Association, the average American spent \$60 on Christmas decorations this year. That is up \$20 from last year.
- 2. Hot Chocolate:** I like drinking hot chocolate. The problem is the average cup of chocolate is 194 calories. The characters in Hallmark movies are always drinking hot chocolate, but they are thin.
- 3. Snow:** I like snow. I just do not like shoveling it. Did you the chance of a white Christmas in Ohio is less than 25%, according to the Weather Channel? This will not be a white Christmas.
- 4. Christmas Movies:** I like Christmas movies. My favorite Christmas movie is National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation. I am not the only one. Did the know that movie, which was made \$27 million, has made \$73 million worldwide. Do you know anyone like Cousin Eddie?
- 5. Receiving Christmas Gifts:** I like getting Christmas gifts, but they made me uncomfortable because they make me feel guilty. I have good life, but there are many who live in poverty. Maybe my gift money should go to them? Did you know 700 million people in our world live on less than \$1.90 a day?
- 6. Spending Time with Loved Ones:** I like spending time with loved ones. Life is short. Christmas is a great excuse to get together. There is an excellent chance you will see the people you love the most in the next 24 hours.
- 7. The Food:** I do not want to shock you, but I like food. Tomorrow afternoon I will eat my fill. I will not be able to eat another bite, and I will announce I will never eat again. A few hours later I will have a piece of pie.

- 8. Giving Back:** I do not mind giving back. It comes in two forms. You can volunteer or you can make a financial donation. Did you know as a rule of thumb 25% of church contributions are given during the month of December?
- 9. Giving Gifts to Others:** I like giving gifts. I cannot wait to see if my loved ones like what was purchased for them. I cannot wait to see my granddaughter open her gift from us.
- 10. The Christmas Tree:** I like Christmas tree. Do you like a live Christmas tree or an artificial tree? Did you know the average American spent \$78 on a Christmas tree? I am not proud of this, but I spent \$2 more than the national average. It was worth every cent. We have a great tree this year.
- 11. Opening Gifts:** I like opening presents? Do you open your presents on Christmas Eve or do you open your presents on Christmas morning? My family has always gotten up on early on Christmas morning to open gifts. Did you know, according to the National Retail Association, the average American will spend \$998 on Christmas presents?
- 12. The Christmas Spirit:** I try to have the Christmas spirit, because I do not want to look like Scrooge. Have you ever been called a Scrooge?

If you can relate to one of those twelve say, **"Merry Christmas!"** Each one of those things are fun, but to those who believe, there is a deeper side of Christmas. There is the incarnation. That takes us to the scripture lesson for today.

We find ourselves in the second chapter of Luke. Caesar Augustus, who sat on the throne of the Roman Empire from 31 B.C. to A.D. 14, issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. It happened when Quirinius was governor over Syria. That makes the date between A.D. 6 and 9. (Remember, the calendar was adjusted sometime in the past.) It will suffice to say, it was a long time ago. However, some things do not change. The census was taken for two reasons. The first was military serve. The Jews were excluded. The second was taxation. The Jews, like everyone else, were expected to pay. That meant Joseph went to Bethlehem, near Jerusalem, his hometown. He did not travel alone, he traveled with a young pregnant teenager by the name of Mary. This is where the story gets deep. They had never known each other intimately, yet they were legally bound. The child she carried was the son of God and the time was drawing near for her to give birth. Timing is everything. The young couple must have worried the child would come during the journey, but the child waited until they arrived in Bethlehem. Any Sunday school child will tell you were the child was born. The baby, the son of God, the long-awaited Messiah, was born in a manger because there was no room for him in the inn. They named the baby Jesus as

directed by God. The name Jesus means "Savior." I guess names do matter. If any of that sounds familiar say, "**Merry Christmas!**"

It really is quite a story. It is unique to the Christian faith. Did you know, according to the United Nations, approximately 250 babies are born each minute in the world. That comes out to be 130 million in a year. That is a lot of babies in the history of the world. Each baby is special, but one was utterly unique. The infant Jesus changed everything. The deeper side of Christmas revolves around the incarnation of God. The Almighty came into the world to save us because mankind needed, and needs, saved. It has been written, *"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."* Those words still hold true. My we never forget Christmas is a Christian holiday.

Located in Yorktown, Indiana is the New Life Presbyterian Church. The Senior Pastor of that church is a man by the name of Bob O'Bannon. He is a blogger. He says the incarnation is important for three especially important reasons. I will be brief.

1. The incarnation affirms the goodness of the physical existence.

Many devalue the physical and glorify the spiritual. The fact that God came into our world and took a physical form tells us our physical forms are important. Our physical state is equally important to the spiritual realm. 1 John 4:2 says, *"By this we know the spirit of God: every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God."* That is number one. This is number two.

2. The incarnation means God is involved. It is easy to sit back and complain about something. It is something completely different to get involved and to help fix the problem. God just did not complain. God came into the world to become the solution. John 1:9 says, *The true light, which gives everyone light, was coming into the world.* That was number two. This is number three.

3. The incarnation makes it possible for sins to be covered. May we never forget we are sinners. I quote nearly week Romans 3:23 says, *"All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God."* We are saved by grace and by grace alone. If Jesus had never have been born then your final destination would be hell, but Jesus was born, and everything changed. You know the story. Thirty-three later Jesus died on the cross giving us hope of eternal life. The question is do you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, or are you going to hell?

It is the deeper side of Christmas, the incarnation of God. If you are thankful God came to save you say, **"Merry Christmas!"** How can you question God's love? He came for us.

My childhood home had three bedrooms. One for my parents. One for my sisters and one for me. That was fine until company came. Usually, the company was my grandparents from Brooklyn. When they came, I was expelled from my bedroom and relocated to the landing leading up to the house's attic. It was not so bad. My father set up cot and my mother handed me a sleeping bag. I was young, so I enjoyed it. The best part was the window by my cot. It was high and I could survey the whole neighborhood.

One Christmas Eve, I must have been about six years old, I was laying sleepless on my cot. The excitement of Christmas Eve had overwhelmed me. I thought about everything that had happened that evening and I would about my presents the next morning. My mother warned me we would not be opening presents super early. We had to wait for my paternal grandparents to come. They were going to spend Christmas morning with us. They lived about an hour away. I think I must have woken up every fifteen minutes. Each time looking out the window. The time just could not go fast enough. It must have been about 5:00 when the exhaustion overtook me. When I woke up at 7:00 the sun was just starting to appear. When I looked out the window this time, I got a wonderful surprise. My grandparents were sitting in our driveway, so there would be no more waiting. They had been there quite some time because I thin layer of snow covered their car. I told my mother they had arrived, and she hustled down the stairs to let them in. When they walked in my mother confessed, she did not expect them so early. I can still hear my grandfather's response. He said, "We had to come early because we did not want Russell to have to wait to open his presents." Those words enforced what I already knew. My grandfather loved me. How do you question the love of someone who came just for you?

It is not just true of a small boy and his grandfather. It is also of God and mankind. How can you question God's love? He came for you. Christmas is not just about presents and trees. It is not about decorations or food. There is a deeper side. There is the true meaning of Christmas, the incarnation. In Mere Christianity, *"The Son of God became man to enable men to become sons of God."* And all of God's people said, **"Merry Christmas!"**