

Friday 25th December 2020, Christmas Day
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on Luke 2:1 – 20
Theme: “What’s Christmas all about?”
“God’s life-changing gifts of love, peace, joy, and hope”

Introduction:

Well, it’s Christmas Day again.... What’s Christmas all about? That’s what this leaflet, *What’s Christmas?*

In bold headings, it gives the popular, secular answer: “Parties”, “Presents”, “Great Fun”, and a time for “Relaxing”. That’s how most people see Christmas: as a time for partying with family and friends over first class food; as a time to give and receive presents; as a time to have fun together playing in the pool or playing cricket in the back yard; and a time for relaxing in the Christmas holiday break....

But is that all Christmas is about? No, far from it, as the *What’s Christmas?*

Part 1: Parties?

Parties? Yes!

We celebrate the birthday of Jesus, born in Bethlehem. He is our God. He is one of us.

That’s why we celebrate Christmas!
It’s the birthday of Jesus, God’s Son....

We celebrate the birthdays of people who are important and special to us, don’t we, people like our wife or our husband, our children, our parents, our brothers and sisters, our good friends and so on!?

And Jesus is certainly important and special to us! Through Jesus, *God’s Son become a human being*, we learn how much we are loved by God: *as we listen to him talk about God, and as we watch him love and care for people.*

Through Jesus, the man on the cross for us, we have forgiveness for all our sins: *he suffered and died there, and took on himself the judgement and the punishment that we deserve from God for us sins.*

Through Jesus, the risen Lord Jesus, the One whom God raised from the dead, we have the assurance that death isn’t the end, but the start of a wonderful new future for those who are God’s forgiven children *through their faith in Jesus as their Saviour.*

Is it little wonder that we have “parties” today in our homes and elsewhere to celebrate the birthday of Jesus this Christmas Day....

And that Christians all over the world are celebrating the birthday of Jesus today! For the birthday of Jesus is the birthday of the One who has utterly changed our life....

Part 2: Presents?

Presents? Yes!

Jesus is God's gift just for us! We enjoy this gift when we realize that God gave us Jesus to live and to die for you. We can come to God and know that our sins are paid for and forgiven.

That's why we give and receive presents at Christmas: to remind us of God's great gift to us at that first Christmas. Jesus, God's Son, is God's gift to us, given to us so that we might have "peace" with God.

Remember what the choir of angels sang to the shepherds on the night that Jesus was born? They sang:

**"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased"**

(Luke 2:13-14).

That's what Jesus came to bring! That's why God's Son, Jesus, was born: to make it possible for us to have peace on earth, peace with God, *as we receive God's forgiveness, which Jesus made possible by suffering and dying on a cross for us all,* and peace with one another, *as we forgive one another as we have been forgiven.*

I love the children's story, "the story of the three trees", in this regard. Remember that each tree dreamed about what they wanted to do when they grew up.... The story goes like this:

Once upon a time, there lived three little trees. They grew together on the top of a mountain, and each of them dreamed about what they wanted to do when they grew up.

The first little tree looked up at the stars twinkling like diamonds above him, and said, "I want to hold treasure. I want to be covered with gold and filled with precious stones. I want to be the most beautiful treasure chest in all the world".

The second little tree looked down into the valley where there was a small stream trickling its way to the ocean. As he looked at this small stream, he dreamed about his future. He said, "I want to be a strong sailing ship. I want to travel mighty waters and carry powerful kings. I want to be the strongest ship in the world".

The third little tree looked at the town in the valley below where men and women were busy doing this and that. He said, "I don't want to leave the mountaintop at all. I want to grow so tall that when people stop and look at me, they will raise their eyes to heaven and think of God. I want to be the tallest tree in all the world".

Do you remember the story? I'm not going to retell it all to you now....

But remember that the first tree became the wood for a manger, holding the greatest treasure in the world, God's Son become a human being. The second tree became the wood for an old fishing boat, which one day carried God's Son, the King of kings. And the third tree? He was made into wooden planks which one day were fashioned into a cross on a hill, where God's Son, Jesus, suffered and died for our sins.

Together the story of the three trees reminds us that the baby in the manger became the man Jesus who lived among us as God's Son, and then walked the road to the cross, so that there might be "peace on earth" as we trust in him as our Saviour and have peace with God, and as we forgive one another and have peace with each other.

Part 3: Great Fun?

Great Fun? Yes!

What terrific joy there is in our hearts when we receive this fantastic gift from God. Life then begins to have real purpose.

Christmas is a time when people aim to have "fun" by swimming together in the pool or by playing cricket in the backyard or going to the beach, and so on.... The thing about "fun", though, is that it comes and goes: you might have "fun" for a while doing something, and then you get bored with it, and look for other things to do that might bring you "fun".

The thing about Jesus, God's Son, God's gift to us, is that through him we have a lasting "joy" that no one and nothing can take away.

When you know that you are loved by God, and that you have peace with God through Jesus dying on the cross for us, then we can smile and have a joy within us that no one or nothing can take away from us.

I love the comparison between Santa and Jesus that I came across a while back.... It was called, "Why Jesus is better than Santa Claus". It goes like this:

Santa lives at the North Pole....

Jesus is everywhere.

Santa rides in a sleigh...

Jesus rides on the wind, and walks on the water.

Santa comes but once a year...

Jesus is an everpresent help.

Santa fills your stocking with goodies...

Jesus supplies all your needs.

Santa comes down a chimney uninvited...
Jesus stands at the door and knocks, and then enters your heart when invited.

You have to wait in line to see Santa...
Jesus is as close as the mention of his name.

Santa lets you sit on his lap...
Jesus lets you rest in his arms.

All Santa can offer is HO HO HO...
Jesus offers peace, help, and hope.

Santa may make you chuckle but...
Jesus gives you lasting joy.
While Santa puts gifts under your tree...
**Jesus became our gift and died on a tree...
the cross.**

Let me focus for a few moments on the second last of these:
Santa may make you chuckle but...**Jesus gives you lasting joy, a lasting joy that will be in you even in the darkest times of your life.**

This was the message of the angel to the shepherds on the night that Jesus was born. Listen *again* to what the angel said to the shepherds:
“Don’t be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David’s town your Saviour was born—Christ the Lord!” (Luke 2:10-11).

This is what Christians, followers of Jesus, have experienced down through the ages: the “great joy” that comes from knowing that you are loved by God and that you have God’s ongoing forgiveness as you trust in Jesus as “your Saviour”.

And this is what you and I have through Jesus.... It is a life-transforming joy that we have, which enables us to smile and rejoice as we live out our life.

Is it little wonder that we celebrate Christmas?!
Through the birth of Jesus, God’s Son, for us our whole life has been changed!!

Part 4: Hope

Relaxing? Yes! The writer of our leaflet writes:

How marvelous it is to relax and be at peace with God! We have been given God’s greatest gift – His Son, Jesus.

Isn’t great to know through Jesus, God’s Son, that you are loved by God, and to know that you are right with God, as you trust in Jesus as your Saviour!! When you know

that you are loved by God, and forgiven all your sins through Jesus dying on the cross for you, you can “relax” and “be at peace with God”.

Christmas is a great time when we can rejoice in “God’s greatest gift”, the gift of “His Son, Jesus” ☺

And yet for some of us, *even many of us*, Christmas is not a great time, *even a miserable time*. Our dream, our dream of hope, is that things can be different. And the wonderful message of Christmas is that things *are* different, and *can be* different, and *will be* different because of the birth of Jesus....

Margaret Wagge is another one who realized this. Her story is told in a leaflet that was mailed to me from ACTS International for Christmas *at while ago*. Listen to her story, as it told by Richard W. Innes:

It was Christmas Eve and people all around were chatting excitedly as Margaret Wagge stood waiting for her train. She had been working alone all morning at her typing job, while her fellow workers had been given the day off. Standing dejectedly in the crowd listening to the conversations, she sadly pondered on what she had to look forward to at the special time of the year – no husband, no children, no home, just a rented room.

“Suddenly, I heard the crystal notes of two flutes interweaving. Down the platform were two girls, playing Christmas carols. In their serene beauty, they looked like angels in disguise”. Margaret’s train came and went.... She lingered as if spellbound by the music of Christmas.

“Finally”, Margaret wrote, “I heard the girls play ‘O Little Town of Bethlehem”, and I found myself remembering words that I had not sung since my childhood.

**‘O Holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us we pray;
Cast out our sin and enter in,
Be born in us today’.**

And suddenly, there in this bleak subway station, everything was changed”.

Richard Innes adds:

Strange as it may seem, Christmas, for millions, is not a happy ‘joy to the world’ occasion, but a time of deep loneliness due to lack of close family and friends.

However, the Christmas story for millions does bring, not only untold comfort and consolation, but also the greatest chance for hope in all the world: the hope of God’s forgiveness of sins, the hope of unconditional love, the hope of peace, the hope of eternal life with God himself, the hope of knowing that in Heaven there will be no more sickness, sadness, suffering, or sorrow – ever.

By “hope”, Richard Innes doesn’t mean a wishful, whimsical type “hope” that *expresses hopeful wish that things might be different*.

No, he is talking about the sure, certain “hope” of a changed life: now, in the future, and in eternity.

So do you hear what he is saying? He is saying that our life can be completely changed because *of the birth of Jesus, God’s Son, for us.*

Conclusion:

So “What’s Christmas all about?” The popular, secular answer is “Parties”, “Presents”, “Great Fun”, and a time for “Relaxing”. That’s how most people see Christmas....

But as this little leaflet reminds us, and as I’ve tried to remind us all here today on Christmas Day, the birth of Jesus is much, much more than all this....

The candles on the Advent Wreath remind us of this. Each candle reminds us of the blessing that are ours because of Christmas: LOVE, PEACE, JOY, and a certain HOPE.

May God bless you as you celebrate CHRISTMAS today, and as you let Jesus CHRIST change your life, and go on changing your life.

Addendum:

The story is “the story of the three trees”.... It’s a children’s story, but it is a powerful story that reminds us that Jesus didn’t stay a baby in a manger. The story goes like this:

Once upon a time, there lived three little trees. They grew together on the top of a mountain, and each of them dreamed about what they wanted to do when they grew up.

The first little tree looked up at the stars twinkling like diamonds above him, and said, “I want to hold treasure. I want to be covered with gold and filled with precious stones. I want to be the most beautiful treasure chest in all the world”.

The second little tree looked down into the valley where there was a small stream trickling its way to the ocean. As he looked at this small stream, he dreamed about his future. He said, “I want to be a strong sailing ship. I want to travel mighty waters and carry powerful kings. I want to be the strongest ship in the world”.

The third little tree looked at the town in the valley below where men and women were busy doing this & that. He said, “I don’t want to leave the mountaintop at all. I want to grow so tall that when people stop and look at me, they will raise their eyes to heaven and think of God. I want to be the tallest tree in all the world”.

Well, years passed, and the three little trees grew strong and tall. One day, three woodcutters climbed the mountain. The first woodcutter looked at the first tree and said, “This tree is beautiful. It’s perfect for me”. He chopped the tree, and after a while the first tree fell. The first tree smiled as he fell. He thought to himself, “Now I will be made into a beautiful treasure chest. Now I will hold wonderful treasure”.

The second woodcutter looked at the second tree and said, “This tree is strong. It’s perfect for me”. He chopped the tree, and after a while the second tree fell. The second tree smiled as he fell. He thought to himself, “Now I will sail the oceans of the world. Now I will be a strong, mighty ship fit for kings”.

The third tree felt his heart sink as he saw the third woodsman look at her and raise his axe. He stood straight and tall, and pointed bravely to heaven. But the third woodsman scarcely looked at him, as he started chopping. “Any kind of tree will do for me”, he said, as he chopped the third tree to the ground

The first tree rejoiced when the woodcutter brought him to a carpenter’s shop, but the busy carpenter wasn’t thinking of making beautiful treasure chests. Instead, he used the tree to make a feed-box for animals. The once beautiful tree was not covered with gold or filled with treasure. Instead he was covered with sawdust and filled with hay for hungry farm animals.

The second tree smiled when the woodcutter took him to a shipyard, but that day no mighty ships were made. Instead, the once strong tree was hammered and sawed into a simple fishing boat. Too small and too weak to sail an ocean, he was taken rather to a little lake.

The third tree was taken by the woodcutter to a lumber yard, and there he was cut into long wooden beams. He was left confused. "What is happening to me?", he asked. "All I ever wanted was to stay on my mountain top and to point up to God".

Many, many days and nights passed. The three trees nearly forgot their dreams. But one starlit night, the first tree's dreams did come true. A young woman placed her new born baby in the feedbox, in the manger, that the first tree had been fashioned into, and the first tree became a treasure chest holding the greatest treasure in the world.

Many years later, the second tree's dreams came true. A tired traveller and his friends got into the now old fishing boat that the second tree had been fashioned into. The tired traveller fell asleep as the old fishing boat sailed out onto the lake. Soon a raging storm blew up, and the second tree shuddered as he wondered whether he would have the strength to carry so many passengers safely through the wind and the rain. The tired man was awakened by his friends, and he held up his hand to wind and the seas and said, "Stop", and the storm disappeared as quickly as it had come. The second tree's dreams had come true. He had always wanted to carry kings, and now he was carrying God's Son, the King of kings.

Still more years later, the third tree's dreams came true, in a way completely different to anything he had ever imagined. One Friday morning, the third tree was startled as his beams were yanked from the huge woodpile that he had been placed into. He was carried through an angry, jeering crowd, and then placed in the ground on a hill top to form a cross. A man was nailed to him, and there on the third tree that man suffered and died for everyone. The third tree has always wanted people to raise their eyes to heaven and think of God when they saw him. Well, the third tree's dreams did come true. Now whenever people see the cross, that third tree, people think of God and His great love for them (*Stories for the Heart, p. 250-253*).