

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, December 24, 2024
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“Have a Blessed Christmas”

READING: Luke 2:15-20 – When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen which were just as they had been told.

“Merry Christmas!” You’ve heard it in all kinds of places from department stores to doctors’ offices, on Christmas cards and newscasts, from San Francisco to Maine. It’s a throw-away phrase for many, appropriate to the season, but generic in its content and meaning. For Christians it carries much more meaning and a greater joy, but even for us, we tend to wish it on everybody without a whole lot of thought as to how it’s received.

I know a fairly large number of folks for whom Christmas will most definitely NOT be a merry one. Sixteen members of our congregation were called away to their eternal rest since the last Christmas. Their survivors will most likely be missing someone at Christmas for the first time. For many that absence will be painful, their grief jagged and hard. For others, they’re taking treatments for cancer for the first or second year of their affliction. They are tired all the time, worn out by constant medical appointments, tests, and procedure. Hard to be merry even though it’s Christmas. Still others have had broken bones, broken hearts, broken homes during this year and the brokenness still assaults them with a dull ache and a deep sadness. No, Christmas is not and cannot be merry for many people.

But it can be a BLESSED one! Blessed because their focus can be on the central, most important, and most amazing event in all of the Christmas hubbub: the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ! A “Merry Christmas” tends to put the focus on you and your activities in the holiday season: gift-giving, decorating, family get-togethers, and the like. But a “Blessed Christmas” focuses on God’s actions, his gift to us in sending his one and only Son in the flesh in a little Podunk town named Bethlehem. A “Blessed Christmas” takes stock of what that birth means for us, what it gives to us, and what it does for us. His coming signals God’s abiding love for humanity. It signals His willingness to COME TO US because we cannot come to Him. It signifies the beginning of God’s fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies. It tells us that our salvation was and is at hand. By the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of this one named Jesus, we can have peace with God no matter what our circumstances in this world.

I don’t have any problem with many of our Christmas traditions. I send Christmas cards to family and friends I don’t see as often as I’d like. I give gifts to family and friends. I enjoy get-togethers and egg nogg and fresh Christmas cookies. I even say “Merry Christmas” from time to time. But in these last 5 or 6 years, I find myself more often than not saying, “Have a Blessed Christmas.” The trials and disappointments of life in this world often make it difficult to find merriment. Laughs can be hollow. Smiles can be forced. We can go through the motions of being jolly while on the inside our grief is corroding our joy.

Better, I think, is to be encouraged to look at the blessings of Christmas, and it all starts with thanksgiving to God for sharing his Son with us. It continues with our amazement at the incarnation: that God would take on our flesh and our troubles and our sin in order that we might be given forgiveness and hope. “Have a

Blessed Christmas” helps us focus on God’s actions on our behalf and the promises he fulfilled with them. It helps us keep our eye on the prize: Jesus, Son of God and Mary’s son, come to save his people from their sins. That might not make us merry, but it certainly can help us realize the blessedness of Christ’s Nativity and its impact on our past, present, and future. Have a Blessed Christmas in Jesus’ name. Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1) CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES: 5:00 and 11:00 PM with communion in both. CHRISTMAS MORNING SERVICE: 10:00 AM with communion.

2) NEW YEAR’S EVE SERVICE: December 31, 5:00 P.M.