

**WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, December 15, 2020**  
**Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN**

**“God with Us”**

**READING: Matthew 1:18-25 – This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” – which means, “God with us.” When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.**

Well, I saw something new while I was out jogging last week: a new addition to the pagan pantheon of Christmas characters that decorates the front yards, Christmas cards, and children’s books of America. Okay, prepare yourselves. It’s time for my annual rant against the commercial/pagan alliance that is ever ready to usurp the true and beautiful meaning of Christian Christmas. What engenders this particular rant is a llama! A llama wearing striped Christmas socks and a lovely red bow around his neck. A freaking llama! What does a llama have to do with Christmas? About as much as the vast majority of lawn decorations I see every year as I run through the various subdivisions in my neighborhood.

This year it’s a llama that offends me, but there are so many more. It pretty much started with old Santa Claus himself, a right jolly old elf. Oh, and let’s not forget his eight tiny reindeer! If I saw a fraction of the deer on opening day that I see gracing people’s yards, I’d need ten freezers to hold all the venison. Next, I believe, came Frosty the Snowman. You see him quite a bit. And then came Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer and his buddies: The Abominable Snowman, the Dentist, and Yukon Sam, or Mike, or Whatever. They’re all classics, of course. But now we can add to the pantheon, thanks to Coca-Cola, polar bears and penguins, who of course do not even live on the same continent with one another. You see penguins EVERYWHERE. And a new phenomenon that showed itself about 4 or 5 years ago: moose (or is it “mooses” or “moosi”?). I’m not at all sure where they came from, except they possibly felt slighted by all the attention the reindeer were getting.

Not to be outdone, some folks decided to eschew Christmas and winter themes all together. There’s a house on Klerner near Grant Line that has a large, animated dragon in their yard. A dragon! The very symbol used in Revelation for the devil is now a Christmas decoration! Oh, and let us not forget other notables who have made their appearances: Winnie the Pooh, Mickey and Minnie Mouse, Santa’s train, nutcrackers of all sizes, Santa in a biplane (I kid you not!), Snoopy and most of his friends, and...a giraffe! A giraffe! What in the world?

So, let me say right now, if you have one or more of these figurines standing out in front of your house at this very moment, please don't go outside and smash it up! You are not sinning or causing "one of these little ones" to sin. That is not my point. (Well, maybe the dragon should be gutted and burned!) My point this morning is to show just how hard it can be to keep CHRIST in CHRISTmas. Along with the shopping and gift-giving, the cookies, the wrappings, the Christmas specials and children's pageants (in a normal year), the UPS, FedEx, and Prime delivery trucks, and all the other window dressings of the season, Jesus can be lost in the ground clutter.

Our reading for today is the most important, the most beautiful story ever written. It is full of grace and hope and promise and wonder. God's own Son sets aside his glory to become a human baby born of a young virgin, to a family of the most meager means. There's an unexpected pregnancy, a husband who feels jilted, an unconsummated marriage, the threat of a divorce, and complications out the Wazoo! But in all of it, through all of it, because of all of it, an ages-old prophecy is about to be fulfilled: Immanuel, "God with us!" This is what you and I don't want to overlook or minimize in our Christmas observances. This is the story we need our children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren to hear and learn and celebrate. All the other stuff is truly just STUFF. At the heart and center of this season MUST be Jesus, always and only Jesus.

So celebrate the season with all the trimmings but be sure to contemplate and linger over the announcement, the circumstances, the struggles, the birth, the angels, the shepherds, the star, the Magi, and, most importantly, the MEANING of it all. "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." He comes, not on a sleigh with "Ho, Ho, Ho's". He brings gifts of forgiveness and salvation. He fights someone more abominable than a snowman. He comes to a world of misfits, lost in sin and darkness, and restores them to the image of his Father. He takes the slurs and the mistreatment of those who should have welcomed his coming, and then he saves them, not with a bright red nose, but with his own bright red blood. He is our Savior, our Redeemer, our Lord and our God, and we do well to welcome him into our hearts once again. Enjoy the wrappings, but don't overlook the Gift! Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENT(S):

**ADVENT SERIES:** "Act Justly, Love Mercy, and Walk Humbly with Your God" (Micah 6:8)  
Wednesday, tomorrow, 7:00 P.M. – December 16. Tomorrow I'll be speaking about "Walk Humbly with Your God".

"GIFTS FOR KIDS" – Thank you, thank you, thank you to all who helped us gift children in needy home again this year. For the money and toys and games you donated, for the shoppers who spent time and energy finding just the right stuff, for the wrappers who have wrapped dozens and dozens of gifts, and for Karen in the office who took and made dozens and dozens of phone calls, to all of you I say thank you and God bless you. We provides gifts to 67 children and a dozen or so teenagers. We made Christmas a little less stressful for single moms and families who could not afford much this year. We made a difference. Thanks.

**CHRISTMAS SERVICES:** Christmas Eve at 5:00 and 11:00. Both of these will be live online. Communion in both services as well. Christmas morning at 10:00. Not online. Communion.