

Weekly Devotion for December 21, 2020  
Pastor Matt Woods, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, Indiana.

“Christmas Is Associated with...”

Hello again and Merry Christmas to you and to your family. This week we celebrate one of the biggest day’s of the Church Calendar because it marks the day that our Lord entered into humanity as a babe in Bethlehem.

I have always been fond of Christmas. Our Christmas growing up in Michigan were a lot like the depiction in the movie, “A Christmas Story”. We opened gifts at the crack of seven in the morning; after waiting and eagerly anticipating for a least an hour. It was the one day of the year when we got to wake mom and dad up to start the day. On the other hand, Christmas meant we were going to have family over. When I was little, my great grandparents were always with us at Christmas as we opened our gifts. It was one of my favorite parts; knowing that they were going to be there. In the afternoon everyone else would come, Nana and her husband, Tom; My Aunt Diane, and my cousins. I loved it. Even now as an adult, I love Christmas, because it means that I am going to see our family; mom and dad, Josh and Daniel, Kyle and Makayla, Diane and others. I always associate Christmas with family and with very fond memories because of those long-standing traditions.

Of course, not everyone thinks Christmas in the same way. A first Christmas after the loss of a loved one can quickly associate Christmas with a sense of that loss. This is especially true for anyone whom we lost at or close to Christmas time. For others, like Helen Bohannon who have their birthday within the week of Christmas, well guess what? You just know that Christmas is going to trump your Birthday every year. And if you do want to throw a theme party...well... you may be stuck with a Christmas theme anyway. Sometimes I hear that someone has gotten a new dog at Christmas. I guess you could name a dog like that, “Christmas” if that happens. “Here, Christmas...good dog.” Christmas might mean a good tummy scratch and a new dog toy.

Of course, we know about regular things too, colorful lights, chess-nuts playing next to an open fire, a Christmas tree, stockings hanging, wreaths, poinsettias, and ugly sweaters. But we also associate Christmas with certain hymns too; O come, O come, Immanuel, Angels We Heard on High, and Pastor Kischnick’s favorite, O Holy Night. He says he doesn’t like that one I think because he can’t hit the high notes. Too bad, he’ll get over it--its one of my favorites for sure. For most we probably associate a wide variety of things with Christmas, multiple things; never just one thing. But whatever we associate with Christmas chances are those associations may evoke strong emotions of some kind, even some negative ones unfortunately. What things do you associate with Christmas? What stands out for you as we get close to Christmas? Maybe, drop me a note at my email: [matt.woods@glcna.com](mailto:matt.woods@glcna.com).

Naturally, Christmas is more than a feeling, or a nostalgic trip down memory lane. Christmas is nothing without Jesus taking on flesh and coming into the world. So, this week I am laying a heavy emphasis on this very thing. And so today, I invite you to hear from Matthew 1:18-25. <sup>18</sup> This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

<sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,<sup>[1]</sup> because he will save his people from their sins.”

<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

<sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

This week I will be looking at this text on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day. I will be looking at Isaiah 7 along with this text this week as Isaiah prophecies about the virgin conceiving and giving birth to Immanuel. This coming Sunday I also will be looking at Psalm 2 which is very strongly related to this passage as it talks of the Messiah coming to us as King descended in the line of David (See also 2 Samuel 7, Jeremiah 33:14-17). But in each case, I am captivated by the simplicity of the text and the many promises it brings together besides Jesus being the eternal king descended from David. The fact is, in scripture, Christmas is associated with well-known prophecies being fulfilled. All of OT prophecy settles in on Jesus; being born of Virgin (Isaiah 7:14) and born in Bethlehem, the city of David (Micah 5:2). The scriptures declare Jesus to be Christ the Lord (Luke 2).

Christmas is also associated with Good Friday and Easter Sunday. They come as a set much like a nativity set. A nativity set is centered around Jesus but a complete set always includes Mary and Joseph, shepherds, wisemen and an angel. Likewise, Christmas only makes sense and is complete when it connected to Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

We hear this in prophecy as well. “Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. – Isaiah 53:10. The New Testament writers all believed this. Paul for example says in Romans 5:8, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” For the earliest believers Christmas is the birth of the Messiah who died for our sins on the cross and rose again. And the New Testament writers believed in Jesus as God in the flesh; They confessed it as we do-- “*conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, Crucified, died and was buried, and on the third day rose from the dead.*” Jesus is Christmas.

And this is the good news. Christmas brings to us more than nostalgia; and something else besides loneliness, or another birthday cake. It brings us Jesus who loves the misfits, the misguided, and the miss Americas alike. We don’t have to have it altogether to fit into His kingdom. He will meet you wherever you are. Because what He associates with you is His image. You are His favorite part about Christmas—you are His favorite part about Creation. And by his grace and invitation He wants you over to His House for eternity where we get to gather around the Tree of Life; in a place that will never stop celebrating. We will be well-fed and most welcome. This is just a little bit of what we hope that you will associate with Jesus. So, I say Merry Christmas and May God bless you this week as we worship the Lord, the Babe of Bethlehem.

Reminder of services this week—  
Thanks for Gifts for Kids

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine you and be gracious unto you. The Lord look on You with His Favor and give you His peace in Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Matthew Woods  
John 3:30