

Finding Christ in Christmas
Pastor Joe Oakley – GFC – 12-24-22

If you watched local news this week, you're probably aware that the baby Jesus was stolen from the nativity scene at Sundance Square. The police have been searching for the thief and for the baby Jesus all week. They even asked the public to get involved in the search. I'm happy to report that while the thief has yet to be caught, the baby Jesus was returned safe and sound.

That story caused me to think about how much effort went into finding a baby Jesus doll, but how little effort people put in to find the real Jesus! In fact, many people will go through the Christmas season without thinking about Jesus Christ even once! That's why I'm preaching on Finding Christ in Christmas.

Christmas time is one of the busiest times of the year.
 And people spend much of that time trying to find things.
 They try to find the perfect gift for everyone on their list.
 They try to find the right ingredients for their Christmas meal.
 They try to find a parking spot at the mall.
 They try to find the time to get everything done.
 And when it's over they try to find the money to pay for it all!

The ironic thing is that in the midst of all this finding - many people fail to find what they should be finding at Christmas - Jesus Christ! Many people have forgotten the true reason for the Christmas season. It's come to be a hectic holiday of shopping in order to give gifts to each other. Now there's nothing wrong with giving to each other, but we must remember the reason behind this season. As we read in Matthew chapter 1:22-23

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."

Jesus came to save us from our sins and to be God with us. And we need to understand why He did it. The whole point of the baby's birth is this: We were created for relationship with God - Sin broke that relationship - But God loves us so much and He wants relationship with us so much that He sent His Son to become a man in order to die for our sins and restore that broken relationship. That's what we celebrate at Christmas!

But a lot of people celebrate nothing at Christmas or they celebrate the wrong things at Christmas. They celebrate everything and everyone except Jesus! Research by the Barna Research Group found that only 37% of adults thought the birth of Jesus is the most important aspect of Christmas. To most people, Christmas is about presents, parties and a paid holiday.

44% of the respondents said family time is the most important part of the Christmas celebration. Family is important and gifts, parties and days off are great. But I urge you - don't forget about Jesus as we celebrate His birthday.

When I think about finding Christ in Christmas I think about the Wise Men. Everyone in this story had to do some traveling. The shepherds were the closest in the fields outside Bethlehem. Mary and Joseph had to travel 90 miles, which took about a week. We don't know how far the wise men traveled because we don't know where they started. The Bible just says they were from the east. That could be across the river in Jordan. Or that could be from Persia which would've been a 1,000-mile round trip.

They spent a lot of money and time following a star trying to find Jesus. To follow this star, they had left behind home and family. Along the way, they no doubt had to face perils and obstacles.

The Wise Men probably thought they would find the Messiah in a palace. That explains why they went to the place where the king lived – in Jerusalem. But Jesus was not there! They thought they would find Jesus in the city of kings – but He was in the city of shepherds.

But they kept searching until they found Jesus. And when they found Jesus, they worshipped Him and gave Him gifts. I find that profound! Why? Because many people today search for Jesus so they can get something from Him. But the wise men searched for Jesus so they could give to Him!

What brought these wise men to a decision to seek out and find “the King of the Jews”? They didn't have all the facts when they started, but they had enough to know they needed to search. And the motivation for that search came from what the wise men saw in creation. Psalm 19:1-4 says:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

God's power and creative handiwork are demonstrated in the heavens. As the wise men applied themselves to observing the heavens their attention was drawn to one particular star. They felt led to follow that star and they eventually found Christ. You see, God gives us enough light that we might search for more. Wise men follow the light that they have! They walk by faith, not by sight. When God says go they go. When God says stop they stop!

The wise men also searched the Scriptures for information on where the Messiah's birth would be. At the time when these wise men made their search, only the Old Testament was at their disposal. But they studied enough to know that a “Messiah” was coming.

You and I have so much more information than these men did. We have the complete Word of God – both the Old & New Testaments. To seek the Lord requires us to get in this book – and read. Let God speak to you and guide you through His Word.

The wise men were committed and determined in their search. It is possible these men may have traveled up to 1000 miles on their trek and they would see their search through to the end.

Are you determined like that in your spiritual search? The wise men did not quit because their journey was long and difficult. Yet some of us have trouble getting out of bed on Sunday morning. The wise men's journey was costly. Yet for some of us – any cost in any way is too much.

Did the wise men ever grow tired? I'm sure they did. But they kept going.
 Did the wise men ever get discouraged and feel like quitting?
 I'm sure they did, but they kept going.
 Did the wise men ever get ridiculed for following a star to who knows where?
 I'm sure they did, but they kept going.

Some of us have very little commitment and we give up way too easy. Especially when it comes to the things of God – which by the way – are infinitely more important than anything else in life. Oh that we had a church full of believers totally committed to the cause of Christ and His church. Who are committed no matter what the circumstances. We could change the world!

God wants us to seek after Him with our whole hearts. Jeremiah 29:13 says:

You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.

Hebrews 11:6 says:

Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

God rewards those who seek Him with their whole heart. Not those who seek Him a little or those who seek Him half-heartedly. He rewards those who diligently seek Him with their whole heart. And what's the reward? Him!

When you seek for something, you are rewarded when you find what you are looking for. The searchers for the Titanic would not have been satisfied with finding anything else at the bottom of the ocean. The reward was the Titanic. The wise men were not satisfied until they found the Messiah. He was their reward.

So what are you seeking and celebrating this Christmas? I want to tell you three things you can celebrate this Christmas. When God sent Jesus Christ to Earth, He was saying three things.

One, God loves us. Two, God is with us. Three, God is for us.

And no matter what you are going through, you can celebrate those three things: God loves you, God is with you and God is for you!

If you think about it – Christ coming to earth was an amazing event. God coming to earth as a baby is the biggest miracle and biggest event in history.

Have you ever wanted to ask the Lord why He left heaven to come to earth?

Why did you leave the throne where you were surrounded by angels to come to a manger where you were surrounded by animals?

Why did you leave heaven with its streets of gold to come to earth with its dusty streets?

Why did you leave heaven where there is no pain and no tears to become a man of sorrows acquainted with grief?

Why did the King of Kings and Lord of Lords have to become a baby?

Jesus came to earth to bring us Christmas presents from God. He came to bring us peace, love and great joy. Everybody on this planet wants those three things and everybody seeks them.

What many people don't realize is that peace, joy and love are byproducts of a relationship with Jesus Christ. They're looking for love in all the wrong places – when all along it is God's gift of a Savior that results in us being able to have peace, joy and love. Those three things are the Christmas gifts from God. The most famous verse in the Bible, John 3:16, says:

God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

That's the good news. God so loved the world. That's why He sent Jesus. Christmas is God saying to you, "I love you."

That's why we celebrate the birth of Jesus! He made you to love you, to bring you into His family and to be His friend forever. This is especially important – your life depends on this. The Bible makes it very, very clear – God loves you. To make it even clearer, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ to earth as a human. This is called the Incarnation. God became flesh. That's what we celebrate on Christmas.

Sometimes when you have something important to communicate – you can't send a representative. You must communicate it personally. That's what God did at Christmas! God did not send an angel or a prophet or a politician or an ambassador – He sent His Son.

The problem with many people is that they just see Jesus as a baby. But Jesus did not stay a baby in a manger. He became a man who paid the price for every sin we would ever commit.

He did that by dying on a cross and He proved it was true by coming back to life!
This is good news!

Jesus Christ is God's Christmas gift to us. Yet, some of us have gone Christmas after Christmas and never opened the biggest gift under the tree – the gift of salvation.

Not only does God want to give you gifts; He wants to make the most amazing exchange of gifts you could ever imagine. You might think, what can I give to God? Well, I'll tell you. Christmas is Jesus Christ saying to you:

Give me your sin and I'll give you salvation.

Give me your empty heart and I'll give you meaning and purpose.

Give me your worry and I'll give you peace.

Give me your fear and I'll give you faith.

Give me your addiction and I'll give you freedom.

Give me your depression and I'll give you joy.

Give me your discouragement and I'll give you hope.

Give me your guilt and condemnation and I'll give you forgiveness.

Don't miss the purpose of Christmas. Jesus is the reason for the season, but in some circles you hear more about Santa Claus or something else.

But Christmas is not about what's under the tree. It's about the man who hung on the tree. It's not about having a vacation. It's about having salvation. It's not about Jingle Bells – it's about the angels' Noels.

It's not about Father Christmas – it's about Father God. Christmas is not about Jack Frost – it's about Jesus saving the lost! It's not about Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer – it's about Jesus and His red-stained cross. It's not about the Grinch who Stole Christmas – it's about the Christ who gave Christmas. It's not about Frosty the Snowman – it's about Jesus making you a new man.

Don't miss the greatest gift you can ever receive. In history's greatest miracle, God became a human being. The King of King and the Lord of Lords - the creator of the universe - chose birth in a stable and death on a cross so He could give us gifts from God.

That's why we celebrate Christmas: Jesus came to earth to die for our sins and give us His gift of eternal life and relationship with God. And as a result of receiving Jesus – you receive peace, joy and love!

Where are you in your search?

If you are here without the Lord Jesus Christ as your savior, please do yourself a favor and seek out the truth about Jesus. Romans 10:9 says:

If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.