

Mt Carmel UMC

December 17, 2023

Third Sunday of Advent

“Christmas Is Not Your Birthday” – John 1.6-8, 19-28 - Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

Our Jewish brother's and sister's have just celebrated Hanukkah - an eight day "Festival of Lights." The festival is celebrated for eight days each December to commemorate the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after it was reclaimed from the Syrians by the Maccabees in 165 BCE. The word "Hanukkah" means "dedication" in Hebrew. The term "Festival of Lights" is derived from the miracle that occurred when a single day's worth of oil burned for eight days in the rededicated temple. During the festival, Jews light a nine-branched candelabrum called a menorah, with one additional candle lit each night. For us as Christians, light has a very different meaning during the darkness of winter. What did Isaiah say? *Arise! Shine! Your light has come; the LORD's glory has shone upon you.* (Isaiah 60:1) What did Jesus say? *I am the light of the world.* (John 8:12) and in the first letter of John we read, *God is light and there is no darkness in him at all.* (1 John 1:5)

Christmas was not John the Baptist's birthday. He was not the light. He came to testify concerning the light. In the lesson this morning, John the Baptist was the messenger not the message. He witnessed to the light. There were those who wanted to make John the center of attention. John knew it was not about him, but about the one who was to come after him. He was the warmup act. He was setting the stage and warming up the crowd. Christmas is not about us, it is not about our children, and yes, I do believe, it is not even about our grandchildren. Unless Jesus is your grandson, it is not about your grandchild! You know the old story, don't you? One day a little boy came home from Sunday school and shared that they had a substitute teacher that morning. His mother asked who the teacher was. The boy replied that he didn't remember her name, but she must have been Jesus' grandmother, because all she talked about was Jesus! If this is Jesus' birthday then, we ought to say something about him! If this is Jesus' birthday then, what are you giving him this year? I would suggest along with John the Baptist that you give him your heart and your witness.

I was blessed on Sunday afternoon in the midst of the time the children were spending time with Santa, making Christmas tree ornaments, and decorating Christmas cookies, all the children came over to sit in front of the manger scene to hear as I told the story of the birth of Jesus.

Advent is about getting ready. John the Baptist called for the people to get ready, and following the words of the prophet Isaiah we heard last week, he knew the time was at hand and the people had to get ready. I am amazed at how much work people do to get the house ready, have you seen some of the ornate yard displays out there this year? And think about all of the elaborate holiday Christmas parties which can go way over the top. As it says on the box with that ominous disclaimer, "Some assembly required," so it would seem that there is always a lot of work that is required to celebrate the birth of the Christ child. What did John the Baptist say? He did not call the people to clean their rooms, but to clean up their act, to repent and turn around, to change their lives and get their hearts right with God. We are to share and play fair. What a concept! If you have two shirts share one, he said. As we saw a couple weeks ago, Jesus will affirm us for giving to the poor, for

when we do that, we are giving to him. (Matthew 25:31-36) We will talk more about this next week: Christmas changes everything.

For many this is “Christmus” because it is all about “Us”. But Christmas is about Christ. I shared with you a few weeks ago that I do not like the word “Happy” in the contemporary translation of the Bible, for the term I know as “Blessed” in the Beatitudes. I also do not like it in regards Christmas either! “Happy Holidays” does not do it for me. I do not even like the line from C. Clement Moore’s “A Visit from St. Nicholas” often referred to by its first line, “Twas the Night Before Christmas” do you remember the end of the poem ... *ere he drove out of sight, “Happy Christmas to all and to all a good night!”* I do not wish people a Happy Christmas or even a Merry Christmas, for it is not about happiness or merriment for me. I wish people a Blessed Christmas, because it is about the blessing of God’s love in the birth of Jesus. Jesus did not come to make us all merry or happy. He did come to offer forgiveness of our sins and invite us into the kingdom of heaven. According to Mike Slaughter in his book *Christmas Is Not Your Birthday*, it was not so much about “getting us into heaven as getting heaven into us!”

Mike called his congregation to put Jesus at the top of their Christmas shopping list and to give to Jesus an amount equal to the amount they spent on everything and everyone else. That seems pretty big to me, but Mike is a challenging guy. I would think that we each can find a way to make a significant contribution or donation as a gift to Jesus this year. Did you know that shoppers around the country say they are planning to spend an average of \$793 for gifts this holiday season (down from \$822 last year) according to the 39th annual survey on holiday spending from the American Research Group, Inc. I don’t know about you, but that is way more than I planned to spend this year! Check it out at:

<http://americanresearchgroup.com/holiday/>

The haunting question that Mike Slaughter raises is, if Christmas is Jesus’ birthday, why do we get all the presents? Give generously this Christmas to the One whose birthday we celebrate. Give to your favorite charities or to the special Christmas offering as an expression of your joy for what God has already given you. Christmas is not about the decorating, the baking, the overeating, the buying, or the selling. It’s about the blessing. Receive the blessing of Christ this Christmas - and be a blessing. Have a Blessed Christmas! Alleluia and Amen.

Christmas Is Not All About Us

Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs 12/11/23

Christmas is not all about us,
Nor all we buy and give.
For the true meaning of Christmas,
Is how in Christ we live.

The Bible says, “God so loved us,”
That for us Jesus came.
God’s love became real at Christmas,
We are never more the same.

Since Christmas is not our birthday,
Where should be our focus?
What all did Jesus do and say?
Let’s do that this Christmas.

Heal the sick and feed the hungry,
Do what Christ asks of us.
Share the Good News. Help the blind see.
Have a blessed Christmas.