

“Christmas Is Coming” – Mark 13.24-37 - Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

Jesus taught the disciples a lesson from nature. *From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.* (Mark 13:28) Jesus wants his followers to watch for signs. In the Holy Land, watching a fig tree can point to a coming spring when it begins to bud. The disciples, and we, can notice certain trees in the spring sprout and come to life after even the longest and harshest winter. In more northerly climates, as Christians we associate another lesson this time of year in our Euro-American culture – the Christmas Tree. Even in the dead of winter it is green! Do some of you still go out to cut down your Christmas trees? Do you know where and when the tradition comes from? The story is about 500 years old. Martin Luther walking home one night was struck by the beauty of the stars shimmering above the evergreen trees (remember it in the German carol “O Tannenbaum?”) So, the story goes that he cut down a tree, brought it in the house and put lit candles on the branches. That would not pass fire code today!

I’ve hiked out into the woods with my family (or walked through the tree lot of already cut trees) and remember looking and searching for just the right one. What makes the right tree right for you? Size is important depending on your ceiling height. And the width is important as there may not be room for an extra wide tree in that space in your house. We may have a preference in type, whether long or short needles. Surely there must be ample branches sticking out for the ornaments and decorations. The trunk must be straight for the tree stand to hold it upright. And there must be enough room underneath it to have space for all those presents. It is amazing year after year there is just the right tree for each of us. I wonder when you reflect on this season, do we spend more time looking for the right trees, presents, decorations or recipes than we do looking for Jesus? Watch for the signs!

This year I invite you to remember your stories as you decorate your home. The tree may be artificial now, but as you decorate, look at each decoration and recall how you have come by it, why you have kept it all these years. May your tree be a memory tree! May it remind you that you are loved by God and others! And this year see if you can make a new memory or two for yourself and others. I will also suggest to you that when you think Christmas is over and you pack up the decorations for another year, leave a special one out to remind you, and all who come to see you, that with Christ in your heart, then every day can be Christmas.

Christmas is Coming! But just when is Christmas? We really do not know the exact date Jesus was born, but early church history settled on the date of December 25th. But not all Christians celebrate it that day, the Eastern Orthodox church celebrates it on January 7th! I would suggest that Christmas – the real meaning of Christmas – may come any day! Jesus used the analogy of a person leaving on a trip and leaving the servants in charge. Along with all of the daily chores, Jesus indicates there is one more thing added to the daily “To Do List” – Watch, Stay Alert, Be Ready! I have added that to my daily to do lists this month.

For many years I would look for a Christmas story to read at the Christmas Eve service at the churches I served. There was one about why Christmas Trees Aren't Perfect. I have given most of them to my daughter to read to my grandsons. One of my personal favorites was a poem by Tom Hegg entitled *A Cup of Christmas Tea*. It's a marvelous story of a man going to visit an elderly aunt and though he is reluctant to go, he is blessed in the end for having taken the time to reminisce and share heart to heart with his dear aunt as they sit and have tea.

While you are watching and waiting this year, I invite you to have a cup of coffee, tea or cocoa and sit and reminisce with Jesus. Go ahead if you dare, ask Jesus what He wants for Christmas! After all it is his birthday! (That was from another of those books and I will preach about it in a couple weeks.) If you do ask and discover what Jesus wants for Christmas, it may not cost you a dime, but it may have an impact on your life and your eternal soul. Invite Jesus to reveal himself; to give you a sign each day through Advent. Pick up an *Advent Devotional* by the Society of St. Andrew, and as you read it, meditate and pray over the next 3 weeks of Advent. (Yes, there are only 3 weeks this year as The Fourth Sunday of Advent is also Christmas Eve!) May you experience the coming of Christ again and again. As you are able, point the signs out to others, especially the clueless!

Lastly, I want to introduce you to another tree: the Jesse Tree! It is based on an ancient prophesy - *A shoot will grow up from the stump of Jesse; a branch will sprout from his roots.* (Isaiah 11.1) Out of the family tree of Jesse (father of King David) a new branch would one day sprout. The Messiah would come. For centuries the people watched and waited. If you are interested in the Jesse Tree, I invite you to check it out at the Gathering Place on Sunday. Alleluia and Amen.

Christmas Is Coming

Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs 11/19/23

Christmas is coming, God, help us prepare.
Start with our hearts for it starts right there.
It's more than the tree, the candles, or wreath,
It starts with a star and a manger beneath.

Christmas is coming there's so much to do.
Pray that God grants ample peace unto you.
Live life each day with heartfelt gratitude,
Filled with a joyful Christmas attitude.

Christmas is coming bringing us along,
A time of carols with joy in each song.
Say, "Merry Christmas" to people you greet.
Share Christmas with everyone that you meet.