

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Who here made a Christmas list this year? Maybe asked your family for some gifts? Even told Santa Claus what you wanted most this season? Did you get what you wanted?

Often you'll here Christmas sermons about how, in the manger, we find the best gift of all. Who is that? Jesus! That's right. And, we know that to be true, at least intellectually, that gift that inspired all the gifts we give this season is the Christ Child, God in flesh, fully human and fully divine. That's a majestic, mysterious, miraculous gift.

But let's be honest. It's pretty hard for Jesus to compete with an Xbox One or Star Wars Legos or new cars or surprise vacations. Of course, he's the Lord of the Universe, but

we're drawn often drawn to the exciting, the shiny, the expensive.

We often talk about who shows up at the manger. The shepherds and the angels and the animals bring glory, laud, and honor to our tiny redeemer king. Eventually the magi will show up, likely a few years after Jesus' birth, to bring expensive gifts that honor the birth of the Christ child.

But of course, that means almost the entire population missed this moment! No priests or Pharisees, no Sadducees or zealots, no tax collectors or emperors, none of the powerful or elite or wealthy or even middle class show up at the manger. Now, on that first Christmas, they weren't preoccupied with presents, because that tradition hadn't arisen yet, but they were preoccupied none the less. The religious elite were preoccupied with rigid tradition rather than experiencing the God amongst them. The political elite were embroiled in keeping power rather than recognizing

the divine authority born into Bethlehem's manger. The regular people were preoccupied with fulfilling Rome's census and filling their own bellies, with the ordinary things of life, rather than seeking the extraordinary work that God accomplished this night.

There's one other character who knew Jesus was born, and that's Herod. He hears of this miraculous birth, and rather than embrace the new kingdom that comes through the birth of Jesus, he instead tries to squelch the work of God in the order to kill all children Jesus' age. That order makes Mary, Joseph, and Jesus refugees into Egypt, frightened for their loves at the violence and oppression of their government. Herod's preoccupation was preserving the *status quo*, ensuring he'd never lose power, never have to face the threat of change.

Here, on this eve of Christ's birth, we've decked halls and lit candles to watch for Messiah. We've jingled bells

and prepared the royal highway. We've looked east and woke to greet the new morn. We've baked treats and ate feasts and taken vacation and put on holiday outfits. But are we preoccupied with that stuff? Are we too distracted by the season to welcome the savior?

As we read our last few readings and sing our last few songs, let go of your preoccupations. Be freed of your distractions. Give up the power you want and the control you desire and the money you lust for and the sadness that guides you and the hatred that provides so many obstacles in your life. Because one is coming, to be born again amongst us, that we might be born again without the sins and struggles that wreck our lives. Now, don't get me wrong. Jesus will wreck our lives as well. But he will wreck them with a tragic beauty, a constructive, productive glory that brings the change that the world so desperately needs.

And this is reason to rejoice! Again I say, rejoice! What we await tonight is not just something that but instead everything that we need. On this night grace is born. On this night forgiveness is born. On this night love is born! With Mary and Joseph, with the shepherds and the angels, with the animals that represent the rest of creation, we await at the manger, laying down our demands in order to pick up the gift of God, the gift of life, the gift of Christ the Lord, born into our midst to bring us into the presence of God.

It's almost Christmas. Let go of the things that distract you from the Christ, so that we might all find the renewal that Jesus offers. This is, He is, a majestic, mysterious, miraculous gift, one that will turn our worlds upside down in the best possible way. Amen.