



ONE VOICE JOY

Churches: ♦Bethany ♦Immanuel ♦Lunder ♦Silver Lake ♦Winnebago

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From the Pastor's Desk

"Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child." Luke 2:4-6



As we enter the month of December, excitement and anticipation is in the air as we look forward to Christmas Day. The long dark nights of winter are lit up with bright Christmas lights on the streets of our towns and on our houses, the light of Christmas pushing back the darkness. The lights are festive. The stores are all decorated with Christmas decorations of bright bows of gold or white or red. There are fake branches of ever green with fake snow. Sometimes the stores are decorated with Santa and his elves and reindeer. Homes are often filled with the wonderful smell of Christmas Cookies coming out of the oven. Christmas trees are filled with bright lights, special ornaments, some wrapped presents already lie beneath its branches. Christmas letters are written to family and friends. Shopping for the perfect gifts, anticipating the joy and delight in the eyes and faces of the ones to whom the presents are given. Plans are made for family gatherings. Yes, December is a time of anticipation.

Even in the church, there is a sense of anticipation. The sanctuaries are decorated with Evergreen boughs. Beautiful Christmas trees decorated with Chrismons and other ornaments fill the sanctuary with the hope and joy of Christmas that is coming. The season of Advent is a time of anticipation, looking forward to the day, when Jesus returns and to the celebration of his first coming as a child born in Bethlehem. Each Sunday one of the four Advent Candles is lit bringing more and more light as we draw closer to the celebration of Christmas.

As I read the Christmas gospel, I am often struck by the simple description of the birth of our Lord written by Luke. *"While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child."* The right time came for Baby Jesus to be born. Mary must have been anticipating this day from the moment she heard the news from the Angel Gabriel, that *"she had found favor in God's sight and she would conceive in her womb and bear a son and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High."* Every time she felt the baby move, she must of wondered about the child of God growing within her and what her child might do to bring in the Kingdom of God. As the time drew near and she heard from her husband Joseph about the decree of Augustus ordering a census and all must be enrolled in the towns of their families, she must have wondered about the time the baby is to be born. Would the baby be born in Nazareth? What about the arduous trip? Maybe the baby would be born along the journey. She wasn't looking forward to that possibility. Neither was she looking forward to delivering her child in Bethlehem. Sure some of Joseph's family was there in Bethlehem, but her family was in Nazareth. Who would help her with the birth?

Mary discovered that the Lord had the right time for the baby to born. For the baby was not born in Nazareth. The baby was

not born on the way. But once they arrived in Bethlehem, the time came for her to deliver her child. Even though Joseph couldn't find a room at the inn, even though the only shelter was that of a manger, the time came for her to deliver her child. It was time for the Shepherds in the fields to hear the good news from the heavenly hosts. *"Do not be afraid, for behold I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people . for to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."* It was time, when Caesar Augustus, who called himself the son of god, issuing decrees disrupting every ones' lives, when the true Son of God was born. It was time to fulfill the day that the Prophet Isaiah was so looking forward to as he declared a word of hope. *"For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace."* It was time for hope. It was time for God to become Immanuel, God with us as the baby Jesus let out his cry for life and air, becoming God Incarnate, God in the flesh. It was time for Jesus.

We consider time, our time, as one of our precious assets today. Our schedules get pretty full and we have to divide up our day with work, errands, time for family commitments, time to be spent with children, time for family members, time for the spouse, time for friends, time to try to meet all the demands of work that seem to overflow into our home time. Leading up to the anticipation of Christmas, we have to make time to do the Christmas shopping for presents. Meals have to be planned and groceries must be shopped for at the store. Baking supplies are needed if there is to be time to make Christmas cookies. Time is needed to compose a Christmas letter and a time to send it out. There is a deadline of time to get the presents to the Post Office or UPS or Fed-Ex so presents will be there in time. Time always seems to be short.

So as we enter this time of December, a time of anticipation, a time of rushing, a time of family gatherings, a time of buying and opening presents, gifts of love, let us remember the words from Luke. *"While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child."* Jesus became Immanuel, God with us, in Bethlehem, as it was the time God had chosen to fulfill his prophecy to bring hope, to bring love, to bring joy. Jesus is present and has entered our time, entered our lives. Jesus determined it is time for you to know love. It is time for you to know peace. It is time for you to know forgiveness and reconciliation. It is time for you to know that you are known and claimed. So it became time for Mary to deliver her child in Bethlehem, to become Immanuel, God with us. Have a blessed Christmas.

Pastor Randy



WANDERINGS AND WONDERINGS



Christmas Eve means different things, depending on your age. For our children it is the most exciting evening of the year as you await the arrival of Santa. For parents it mean something more. One unknown



mother sent her own requests to Santa:
*Dear Santa,
I've been a good mom all year. I've fed, cleaned, and cuddled my two children on demand, visited the doctor's office more than my doctor, sold sixty-two cases of candy*

bars to raise money to plant a shade tree on the school playground and figured out how to attach nine patches onto my daughter's girl scout sash with staples and a glue gun.

I was hoping you could spread my list out over several Christmases, since I had to write this letter with my son's red crayon, on the back of a receipt in the laundry room between cycles, and who knows when I'll find any more free time in the next 18 years.

Here are my Christmas wishes:

If you're hauling big ticket items this year I'd like a car with fingerprint resistant windows and a radio that only plays big-people music; a television that doesn't broadcast any programs containing talking animals; and a refrigerator with a secret compartment behind the crisper where I can hide to talk on the phone.

On the practical side, I could use a talking daughter doll that says, "Yes, Mommy" to boost my parental confidence, along with one potty-trained toddler, two kids who don't fight, and three pairs of jeans that will zip all the way up without the use of power tools. I could also use a recording of Tibetan monks chanting, "Don't eat in the living room" and "Take your hands off your brother," because my voice seems to be just out of my children's hearing range and can only be heard by the dog.

And please don't forget the Play-doh Travel Pack, the hottest stocking stuffer this year for mothers of preschoolers. It comes in three fluorescent colors and is guaranteed to crumble on any carpet, making the in-laws' house seem just like mine.

If it's too late to find any of these products, I'd settle for enough time to brush my teeth and comb my hair in the same morning, or the luxury of eating food warmer than room temperature without it being served in a Styrofoam container.

If you don't mind I could also use a few Christmas miracles to brighten the holiday season. Would it be too much trouble to declare ketchup a vegetable? It would clear my conscience immensely. It would be helpful if you

could coerce my children to help around the house without demanding payment as if they were the bosses of an organized crime family; or if my toddler didn't look so cute sneaking downstairs in his pajamas to eat contraband ice cream at midnight.

Well, Santa, the buzzer on the dryer is ringing and my son saw my feet under the laundry room door. I think he wants his crayon back. Have a safe trip and remember to leave your wet boots by the chimney and come in and dry off by the fire so you don't catch cold. Help yourself to cookies on the table, but don't eat too many or leave crumbs on the carpet. Yours Always, Mom

P.S. One more thing: You can cancel all my requests if you can keep my children young . . .

Ah, that would be nice . . . to keep our children forever young, forever joyfully anticipating the arrival of Santa, forever believing that the world is a place completely filled with beauty, and love and joy and peace. But they must grow up and learn about life in the real world. The real world sees Christmas merely as a time to turn a profit on a year's commerce. So, yes, in a sense we would like to keep them forever young.

There is another temptation, however. That is to keep the babe in the manger forever the same.

This is the temptation to come to church on Christmas eve and worship this babe and then to return to our real world lives and to ignore the fact that the Bethlehem babe became a man a man who turned over the money-changers' tables in the temple, the man who lived his life for others, the man who loved the unlovable, cleansed the leper, washed the feet of his disciples, gave his life for the ungodly and on the third day was raised from the dead.

There is the temptation to forget that this man Jesus calls us to follow him all year long, to love our enemies, to do

good to those who mistreat us, to seek to live the kingdom life every day that we walk this earth, always seeking to live as he would have us live. It's all right if sentimentally we want our children small so they can forever be a delight to us, but it is not all right if we want to forever keep the Christ child small so he won't inconvenience us, make demands on us.

Jesus is our Lord . . . and our King . . . and our Savior!

*Wanderings and Wonderings,
Pastor Bill Peters*

