



Sermon Series Notes

“The Christmas Story” (Christmas Eve 2014)

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In A.D. 313 the Roman Emperor Constantine sought to move the Roman people from sun worship to the worship of Jesus Christ. For centuries the Romans had celebrated the "birthday of the sun" from December 18-25 in a festival called Saturnalia. The heavens were the gods of the Romans (the days of the week were Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturday), but at the decree of Constantine, Saturnalia became a celebration of the coming of Jesus Christ.

The Roman Catholic Church had a special mass for Christ called "Christ's Mass" which later (about A.D. 1000) was shortened to Christmas. Many evangelicals over the centuries have thought the customs of Christmas to be Roman Catholic in nature and have refused to participate.

"There will be a fine and imprisonment for anyone who celebrates Christmas. (The Board of Elders, Geneva Switzerland, 1525)

In 1644 the Westminster Assembly in London, England, passed an act forbidding the observance of Christmas by any Christian family or evangelical church.

On December 25, 1620, the Pilgrims covenanted together *"to work steadily throughout the day"* and to not pause for any observance of a Roman Catholic holiday.

"Anyone who is found observing Christmas Day by abstinence from labor or feasting shall pay for each offense the fine of five shillings." (1660 Massachusetts Colony Law)

So Christmas has a history of controversy & confusion. I read this past week that there was a bishop named Nicholas who lived around 300 A.D. Over time he was idolized by a group of sailors (around 1100 A.D.), and a cult began that actually worshipped Nicholas. This cult spread to Italy, where Nicholas supplanted a female deity called "The Grandmother." The Grandmother used to fill the children's stockings with gifts. On the anniversary of Nicholas' death, Dec.6, those who idolized him gave one another gifts at a pageant in memory of him. Nicholas worship merged with the worship of several other deities led by one named Woden, the chief god. Woden had a long white beard and rode a horse through the heavens one evening every Autumn. In 1809, the novelist Washington Irving (most famous for *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and *Rip Van Winkle*) wrote a satire of Dutch culture entitled *Knickerbocker History*. The satire refers several times to the white bearded, flying-horse riding Saint Nicholas using his Dutch name, Santa

Claus. In 1823, a poet named Clement Moore wrote a poem about Santa Claus. He titled it *"'Twas the Night Before Christmas."* Maybe you've heard it;

'Twas The Night Before Christmas, when all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse; The stockings were hung by the chimney with care, in hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there; the children were nestled all snug in their beds, while visions of sugar plums danced in their heads; and mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap, had just settled down for a long winter's nap, when out on the lawn there arose such a clatter, I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter. Away to the window I flew like a flash, tore open the shutters and threw up the sash. The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below, when, what to my wondering eyes should appear, but a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer. With a little old driver, so lively and quick, I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick. More rapid than eagles his coursers they came, and he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name; "Now, Dasher! now, Dancer! now, Prancer and Vixen! On, Comet! on Cupid! on, Dunder and Blitzen! To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall! Now dash away! dash away! dash away all! "As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly, When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky, So up to the house-top the coursers they flew, With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas too. And then, in a twinkling,

I heard on the roof the prancing and pawing of each little hoof. As I drew in my hand, and was turning around, down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound. He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot, and his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot; A bundle of toys he had flung on his back, And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack. His eyes -- how they twinkled! his dimples how merry! His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry! His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow, And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow; The stump of a pipe

he held tight in his teeth, And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath; He had a broad face and a little round belly, that shook when he laughed

like a bowlful of jelly. He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf, And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself; A wink of his eye and a twist of his head, soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread; He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work, And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk, and laying his finger aside of his nose, And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose; He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle, And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.

But I heard him exclaim,
ere he drove out of sight, "Happy Christmas to all,
and to all a good-night."

I personally love that poem, and I personally have no issues with Santa Claus, in the same way I have no issues with Mickey Mouse. My wife and I sat on Santa's lap recently and told him what we wanted for Christmas (show pic from BG).

But while I personally have no issues with Santa Claus, or Mickey, I think it would be good for us to go back to the original record of the Christmas story. The original story will keep us from missing the truth about this tremendous season we celebrate. Read Luke 2:8-14. Matthew 1:21 says that he would "save his people from their sins." Rom.3:23 says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin is death. Hebrews 9:27 says it is appointed unto man once to die, and then the judgment. Facing the judgment without having received Jesus Christ as Savior means an eternity separated from God, and paying the ultimate price for sin (hell &

damnation). But wait a minute, that's the best part of the Christmas story. The rest of Romans 6:23 is very important! The wages of sin is death, but *the gift* of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus is the greatest gift that has ever been given, and the greatest gift that could ever be received!

So we know why he came, but I want to talk for just a moment about a fascinating truth concerning the Christmas story. This child, Jesus, came as the Savior of the world. But who is he, really? The Muslim faith says he was a prophet. Christian Science says Jesus is the human man and Christ the divine idea. The Jehovah's Witness faith says that he is the first son that Jehovah God brought forth. Mormonism says that he is the firstborn of the spirit children of Elohim. The Unity faith says he is the same as the Krishna of the Hindu, the Christos of the Greeks, and the Messiah of the Hebrews. The Unification faith says that he was no different from us except that he was without original sin. Eastern Mysticism says Christ was one of a long line of "Masters" who had themselves realized divinity.

Isaiah 43:3, 10-11 "For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior...Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior.

Isaiah 44:6 "This is what the LORD says – Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God."

Read John 1:1-3, 14; Colonel James Irwin was one of 12 astronauts who had the awesome privilege of walking on the moon. He was the eighth to do so as a member of the Apollo 15 crew. James Irwin said his experiences in space made the presence of God more real to him than ever before. Of the twelve who walked on the moon, he was the first to die (age 61). But he was ready to die, James Irwin had received Jesus Christ as his Savior. When asked about his experience of walking on the moon, here's what James Irwin said: "Far more wonderful than walking on the moon is that one day God walked on earth." He was referring to the child that was born in that Bethlehem manger.

Read Matthew 2:11

In John 10:30 Jesus said "I and the Father are one. The Jews picked up stones & were going to stone him for what they said was blasphemy. They said we are going to stone you because "you, a mere man, claim to be God."

Isaiah prophesied about this Christmas child in Isaiah 7:14 "Therefore the lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." Immanuel = "God with us." Isaiah 9:6 says he will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

The prophet Micah prophesied about this child's birthplace, and with that prophecy added a confirmation as to the true identity of this Savior. Micah 5:2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephratah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." This phrase literally means from eternity.

Psalms 110:4 says that this child would be a priest in the order of Melchizedek, without beginning of days or end of life.

Paul the apostle says in Rom.9:5 that Christ is “God over all.” You can’t get any clearer than that!

In Mark 2 there is an incredible story of Jesus healing a paralytic. What’s incredible is not that he healed the man, but what he said to him before he healed him. He said, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” The Jewish leaders there accused him once again of blasphemy, they said, “Who alone can forgive sins but God!” Then Jesus said to them, “That you may know the Son of Man has authority...to forgive sins,” then he said to paralytic, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” And that’s exactly what the man did. But that trip home was different than any other. Not only did he walk home, but he walked home a different man. He went home at peace with God. He went home a “saved” man, because he had just personally met the Savior of the world.

John 3:16

Invitation