

Good Tidings of Great Joy: (Luke 2:10)
Pastor Bob Vale: December 11th, 2011

Biblical Focus: Luke 2:10 "But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."

Scripture Lesson: Luke 2:1-13 "In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to his own town to register.

^{LK 2:4} So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

^{LK 2:8} And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. ***Bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.*** ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

^{LK 2:13} Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ^{LK 2:14} "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

***Responsive Reading:**

Hymn of Praise: #234 O Come, All Ye Faithful

Prayer Chorus: # 211 O Come, O Come Emmanuel (Only first Verse)

Hymn of Discipleship: # 219 What Child is This?

***Children's Sermon: Candy Canes:**

Solid Praise Songs:

Opening Chorus: Glorious Day:

1. How Many Kings

***Responsive Reading:**

2. The First Noel

Closing Chorus: Joy To The World.

Middle of the Sermon: Watch Video Clip: Space for Jesus in a Busy Christmas:

Already place clip in the tech team folder: 11-14-11.

Responsive Reading:

Leader: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Congregation: And also with you

Leader: Look said the prophet: "A virgin shall conceive and bear a son".

Congregation: You shall call him Emmanuel. which means "God is with us".

Leader: He will be born of the line of David and of his kingdom there will be no end.

Congregation: You shall call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.

Leader: In him all the promises made from the beginning of time to the end shall come true.

Congregation: By him the fullness of God's love shall shine upon the whole world.

Consider Christmas

What's your Christmas perspective? Is it just a holiday, a day off, a day of giving and receiving gifts? Or is it the celebration about the one who has drastically changed your life and provided eternal life for you?

2,000 years ago, our heavenly father gave us the gift of his only son to earth in a small town in the country of Israel called, Bethlehem. It was there Jesus Christ was born into the world. "The Good News" was given to us.

Not long after the birth, life and death of Jesus Christ; the world somewhat forgot about that angelic night of the birth of Christ.

For the most part, new Christians were either in hiding or on the run. Those bold enough to publically say they were part of this new faith group called, "The Way," were being persecuted by both the Jews and the Roman government; Many to the point of death.

Over the next 300 years the struggling Christian faith, despite all the persecution actually grew. In fact, it was growing very fast. Faster than anyone could imagine. All throughout the Roman Empire new churches were popping up. Many from the work of the Missionary Paul, but also from the work of the Apostles and other church leaders in those first few centuries.

Finally the church grew even in the capital city of Rome. Suddenly the Christian faith was Mainstreamed and even was made the state religion by Roman Emperor Constantine.

When Pope Julius I authorized December 25 to be celebrated as the birthday of Jesus in A.D. 353, who would have ever thought that it would become what it is today.

When Professor Charles Follen lit candles on the first Christmas tree in America in 1832, who would have ever thought that the decorations would become as elaborate as they are today.

It is a long time since 1832, longer still from 353 A.D., longer still from that dark night brightened by a special star in which Jesus the king was born. Yet, as we approach December 25th again, it gives us yet another opportunity to pause, and in the midst of all the excitement and elaborate decorations and expensive commercialization which surround Christmas today, to consider again the event of Christmas and the person whose birth we celebrate. Our Savior, Jesus Christ.

The theme for our Advent season is, "Good Tidings of Great Joy." The season of Christmas actually begins just after Halloween. The week after Halloween is over all the Halloween candy that is not sold in the stores goes on a 50% clearance sale and all the decorations come down for the Christmas decorations to come up. The transformation is a thing of beauty.

The season of Christmas is a huge financial boom for the retailers of America that they play up the Christmas theme like no other. I went to the University Park Mall this weekend to walk around and just take a peek at the Christmas decorations. There were beautiful Christmas decorations throughout the mall. There were large green wreaths with gold Christmas bells, the Christmas trees had lights up in them, the mall staff were ready for the Christmas season to begin. (Although they called it the "Holiday Season," we all knew what they meant in this P.C. world we live in.

As much as they were ready to sell merchandise to the public, were they ready to share the message of “Good Tidings of Great Joy?”

This is the message the Angels gave to the Shepherds 2,000 years ago on a dark night outside of Bethlehem.

LK 2:8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. **I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.** ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

“My Time at the Mall looking for Good Tidings of Great Joy”

As I walked through Barns and Nobles Book Store, workers were busy putting up new books on the shelves. There were customers drinking coffee and reading books, and a few were listening to some new Christmas music. I wondered if the Barns and Nobles Book Company was particularly interested in the message of Good Tidings of Great Joy that will be for all the People? I suspect not, although they were selling Bibles and Christmas music in their store. I am sure they were simply busy getting ready for the holiday rush.

As I walked past the Kay’s Jewelry store, I noticed a 25% - 40% holiday sale on diamond necklaces. Not that I was not interested in getting a 25% - 40% discount on an item that was over priced by 200%. However, the store workers were busy cleaning jewelry and setting out new items. I wondered if the people who worked at the Jewelry store ever thought about the message of “Good Tidings of Great Joy” that will be for all the people? (Perhaps not.)

I went to the food court at the Mall to see if I could find the message of “Good News of Great Joy.” The food smelled great and some of the restaurants were even passing out free samples. There was a hint of a Christmas song heard on over the loud speaker. There were so many people, and the Christmas decorations were amazingly beautiful; perhaps this is the place in the mall I could find the Good Tidings of Great Joy which shall be for all the people?

However, all I saw were people quickly ordering their food, sitting down with all their packages they just purchased for Christmas and eating a meal. I did not see anyone praying for their meal. I did not see a decoration of a Manger Scene, angel, or the baby Jesus. Although there were some cute little elves, a few snowmen, a life size Grinch figure and kids taking pictures with Santa Claus; But nothing that said, Good Tidings of Great Joy.

I walked past one store that actually had a long line just to get into the store. I thought to myself, wow, perhaps this is the store that really understands the message of the good news of great joy for all the people. Why else would people be waiting in line at a mall?

There were people of all ages in this line and from all walks of life. Before you could be seen by a sales person, you had to type in your name on a keyboard, and wait for your name to be called. This must be the store that knows about the good news for all people. They must be giving things away very cheaply for folks to wait in line this long.

However, when I got closer and went inside the store, they were not at all interested in sharing the good news of great joy for all the people. Nor were they selling anything cheap. They were excited about selling something else. (That something else also cost a great deal of money!) In fact, some of the people could not get the item they were waiting in line for, because they were sold out, so people had to sign up to be on a waiting list, just to get the item in a couple of weeks.

The store with the long line was.....the iphone store. They really did not have much of any Christmas decorations. They were just selling their product, which people desperately wanted; and willing to pay handsomely for. (Interesting)

I somehow wish there were these kind of lines for folks to be excited about hearing more about receiving Good Tidings of Great Joy for all the People.

The mall was so very crowded that day. People were everywhere getting ready for a holiday that was just around the corner. The entire purpose of why they were in this building was to get ready to

celebrate Christmas. However, were they so busy doing this and that in preparation; that perhaps they have forgotten about the “Good Tidings of Great Joy” message for all the people? I wonder?

Can that happen to us as Christians during Christmas?

Can we get so busy with our calendars & holiday stuff, that we miss the heart and meaning of Christmas?

1. We begin planning for our Christmas parties in November and place on our calendar all the other parties we are to attend.
2. We begin shopping for the gifts we will give to loved one around the tree. (This can turn into a full time job for some people.)
3. We begin baking and creating delicious Christmas Goodies.
4. We decorate the home both inside and out.
5. We make, write, address and stamp all the many Christmas Cards we are sending to friends and relatives.
6. We attend Christmas choir concerts, children’s school pageants, Church cantata’s or perhaps go caroling ourselves.
7. We create a feast of a meal with relatives we have not seen for a year; after we have spend three days cleaning the house to make it presentable.
8. Finally we get to go to the Christmas Eve Service.

Are we too busy during the Christmas season?

Do we not have enough room for Jesus in our Christmas

Do we have difficulty finding the Good Tidings of Great Joy in the way we celebrate Christmas?

Watch Video Clip: “Space for Jesus in a Busy Christmas”:

Already place clip in the tech team folder: 11-14-11.

It seems to me, that we start out with the right idea of celebrating the Christmas Good Tidings of Great Joy for all the people. But then the Business of the season kicks in.

The true meaning of Christmas is no state secret. Perhaps we simply need to be reminded of to “Slow Down and Remember” to focus on the Good Tidings of Great Joy For all the People, before we get swamped with our Christmas schedule, list of things to do, people to see, presents to buy, cards to write and mail and meals to prepare.

Perhaps we as an American culture don’t have time for the Good Tidings of Great Joy for all the people.

At least we’re consistent I suppose. 2,000 years ago it seems only the lowly shepherds had time.

LK 2:8 And **there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby,** keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. **I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.** ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” LK 2:13 Suddenly a great company of the

heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ^{LK 2:14} "**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.**"

I have a question for you today on the 11th day of December, with fourteen days left until we celebrate Christmas.

Do you have time for Jesus this Christmas season?

Are you experiencing the Good News Of Great Joy that will be for all the people?

What is the **Reason for the Season** to you?

I want to challenge you to take the next 14 days and search that question within your heart.

What is the Reason for the Season of Christmas in my life?

1. For shopping?
2. For Giving?
3. For Singing?
4. For Loving?
5. For Decorating?
6. For Serving?
7. For Family?
8. For Time off of work?
9. For Worship?
10. For Celebration of a Gift of God's Son to Humanity?

Christmas is on Sunday this Year!

I don't know if you are aware of this or not, but Christmas is on Sunday this year. Wow, will we have church on Christmas?

Do you know there are actually churches that are not meeting on Sunday because it is Christmas? Their reason: It is too busy of a day for our families to meet for worship. (Really?)

I am reminded of the following verses in the Bible: (Hebrews 10:24-25) "**And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**"

Sunday is the Lord's Day. (Sabbath) This year it happens to fall on the Sabbath Day of Rest as well. Will you be too busy for worship on Christmas?

Our pastors and worship design team here at the church have asked that question about four months ago. We decided to have church that morning, but rather than have two services, we are only going to have **one service that morning beginning at 10: 30 a.m.** for folks who want to come to worship and celebrate "The Good Tidings of Great Joy For all the People!"

On That Sunday morning, December 25th, we will meet to sing the Christmas Hymns of the Faith, we will read the Christmas Story and there will be a special Christmas Play to remind us of the Gift God has given us, through his son Jesus Christ. I hope you and your family can come!

Hymn: I heard the Bells on Christmas Day

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was filled with sorrow at the tragic death of his wife in a fire in 1861. The Civil War broke out that same year, and it seemed this was an additional punishment. Two years later, Longfellow was again saddened to hear the his own son had been seriously wounded as a lieutenant in the Army of the Potomac. Sitting down to his desk, one Christmas Day, he heard the church bells ringing, and ringing. It was in this setting he wrote:

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old familiar carols play
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

And in despair I bowed my head
There is no peace on earth I said
For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep,
God is not dead, nor doth he sleep.
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail
With peace on earth, good will to men.

I wonder if Henry Wadsworth Longfellow were alive today, what words would he pen about the bells of Christmas and the business of our lives this Christmas season.

I'm too busy for Christmas Bells.
There's a half off sale at Bloomingdales.
I'll try text my folks, before I go to bed.
My iphone battery is nearly dead. (Words by Pastor Bob Vale)

America, won't you please slow down.
Remember Christ birth, that's so renown.
This Christmas time will you receive,
The true message of Advent this Christmas Eve? (Words by Pastor Bob Vale)

At this Christmas time whether you are in sorrow, in joy, or just too busy, you can know that God is not dead, nor does He sleep. God knows your every need and longs to comfort you and be that special friend you need. Seek The Lord this year instead of the outward manifestations of the season. God will give life real meaning and your heart real peace. The Lord will give you Good Tidings of Great Joy for All People.

Let's Pray,