

Christ Community Covenant Church
Are you prepared for Christmas?
Pastor Dave Scherrer - December 8, 2013

Are you prepared for Christmas?

I'm told we only have a little over two weeks left till Christmas. How many of you are ready? How many of you have yet to get started with your shopping? I'm just wondering, how many of you have purchased a present on Christmas Eve on your way home from work?

So far we have been singing and worshiping with the idea in mind of the being prepared, which is a favorite theme of scripture when it comes to the coming of Christ. Do you remember the song prepare ye the way of the Lord from the musical Godspell. Yes, some of you? How does it go Curt/Josh. [sings] So it is good to be prepared.

Six year old Robby is one of Santa's biggest fans in Montana. He writes this in a letter to Santa:
I'm ready for you, Santa. We have the back yard shoveled for landing. Mom says you cannot land on the roof this year as it is in pretty bad shape. Not to worry. I spent six hours getting the yard ready. You will see the landing zone marked with four bike flags, five flashlights and the camp lantern. Dad said I could use it until the batteries in it die. We have hay for the reindeer. Carrots too. The back door has been unlocked. If you need the key I put one under the front tire of the car. Dad doesn't know. I will put it back tomorrow. The dog is inside. No worries, he won't attack. He is a believer. I will be in bed at precisely 9:30. If there is anything else you need, please do not hesitate to wake me up. Just don't wake my little sister she is scared of you. She wet her pants sitting on your lap last week. My door has a grizzly bear on it. But be very quiet, my mom is a light sleeper and she screams.

Your friend, Robby

PS Mark, the boy next door is not a believer. Do not go to his house. Can I have his toys?

Robby knows that it is good to be prepared at Christmas. Getting prepared though - I wonder if it is the same for you as it is for me. Do you find Christmas to be kind of overwhelming at times? There are a lot of things to consider and to get ready for. In our culture Christmas has become laden with all kinds of shopping and with that comes finding a place to park and standing in line. There are Christmas cards and baking and candies and even charitable endeavors can be good but a bit challenging. School concerts and church programs. It's a lot! I know a fair number of people who don't really look forward to Christmas. The holidays don't necessarily bring back fond memories and the idea of preparing for Christmas is simply overwhelming emotionally and causes a darkness to settle over them. Everyone else having fun and enjoying themselves only makes some people feel even more sad and disconnected. Christmas can be complicated.

Even more common is that the Christmas story has become a nice, familiar story. You tell it enough and you kind of feel like you know it pretty well and you can just skip it for a year, or even two and it won't hurt anything. You know the story so well you don't feel like you have to get all that prepared for God's Son. You got prepared for him years ago. You practically have the Christmas story memorized!

Luke 2:4-14

⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called **Bethlehem**; (because he was of the house and lineage of **David**

⁵ To be taxed with his espoused wife named **Mary**, being great with **child**.

⁶ And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn **son**, and wrapped him in **swaddling clothes**, and laid him in a **manger**; because there was no room for **them in the inn**.

⁸ And there were in the same country **shepherds** abiding in the field, keeping watch over their **flock by night**. ⁹ And, lo, the **angel of the Lord** came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them:

and they were sore **afraid**.¹⁰ And the angel said unto them, **Fear not**: for, behold, I bring you **good tidings** of **great joy**, which shall be to all **people**.¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is **Christ the Lord**.¹² And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in **swaddling clothes**, lying in a **manger**.¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the **heavenly host** praising God, and saying,
14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

We know it so well we take it for granted. It is like a comforting old blanket or instant hot chocolate. Comforting if somewhat non-descript.

Our theme for this year is **giving Christmas away**. When I suggest that it is a good idea to give Christmas away I'm not saying just ignore it for a year. What I am saying is that Christmas is not the kind of thing that you grip tightly. It is better to hold it loosely and with outstretched hands. But to do that you will need to be prepared. Prepared not with a detailed to do list but prepared in your heart and mind and soul for the coming of the King.

Prepare ye the way of the Lord

The passage we are going to look at this morning is both an Old Testament and a New Testament passage. We find it in Isaiah 40. It is a passage of comfort and joy. Now just for clarity, the first 39 chapters of Isaiah were not so much this message. In fact it was a message of repentance and judgment. The nation of Israel was worshiping other gods and faced destruction by the Babylonians. For 39 chapters Isaiah preached some of the direst messages in Scripture. But then comes the promise! God will not abandon those he loves, He comes to save us and rescue us from our circumstance. And so listen to these words:

Isaiah 40:3-5

A voice cries:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Luke 3:4-6

As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

⁵ Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways,

⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

This passage in the New Testament comes shortly after the Christmas story and I think there is a Christmas message here for us; a message of preparedness. A message about getting ready so that we can give Christmas away and not hoard the good news. To not take the story for granted but rather to offer the story up as a gift to others. There are three parts to this little passage.

Make a straight highway in the desert

Wilderness and desert are symbols of times of despair and times of hardship and wandering. To have a straight path in the desert is to be shown a way out. In the wilderness the tribe would send out a herald to search the land and to find straight paths. Crooked paths are longer and more dangerous. They are places where thieves can hide and ambush you. To have a clear and straight path out of the wilderness - who can ask for more?

Maybe your life feels like a wilderness right now, you feel lost and alone. It is time to prepare for Christmas by letting Christ herald you out, to show you the way to safety and surety. Stop and reflect on the Christmas story. This Christ child is direct from God. Sent to grow up and to serve as your deliverer. You see the action is on you. Make a straight path. Not only for you but also for the coming King. He rides to meet you. He doesn't wait for you to find your own way out. He is the incarnate Christ. God in the flesh comes to rescue you from your sin. He will not leave you to your wilderness sadness alone. He comes! Prepare a straight path for Him!

But that is not all the prophet wants us to know. He has more comfort for us yet. Isaiah says in verse 4 that every valley will be lifted up.

Every valley shall be lifted up

The King has come, and that means then the valleys of our lives have been lifted up. The low places raised and our hearts raised with them. The psalmist says, "Why so downcast oh my soul, put your hope in God." He is moving the earth to set us high. Are you prepared for this overwhelming joy of Christmas? Are you ready to give it away?

I shared with you that many find the holidays to be more dark than joyful. It is difficult to get your eyes off your circumstances. But here is the point. The fact is your circumstances have been made new and sure. He has raised the valley. You may not feel it but the King who came as a baby has and is still lifting you to a new reality. When you give into the Lordship of the baby King you are brought high and received as a co-heir with Christ.

In some mysterious way you too are seated at the right hand of the Father. Not just some day – right now! You now are joined with the risen Christ and all the riches of Heavens are yours. Not to hoard for yourself but to give away. We must be prepared to give Christmas away! Like Abraham, we have been blessed to be a blessing. Give away Christmas because you cannot out give God! Give away Christmas because it is not yours to keep. It is for everyone.

Now that you know that it is no longer appropriate to simply become angry and bitter at those who have made Christmas something other than what it is. It is time to simply give them hope, to confess our faith in the gifts of joy and hope and mercy and salvation. We have to give away Christmas because we remember that you cannot out give God.

Give away Christmas – You cannot out give God

Do you remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount?

Luke 6:38

Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."

We have to hold Christmas loosely and to be prepared to give it away. To share the fact that we have been lifted up and our hope has been renewed. The valleys of our downcast soul and the valleys of death have been defeated. Where there was once no way out, God has raised us up to firm footing; onto solid rock where we can build a safe house of faith. We have utmost hope that there is a path out of our desert and wandering. That He has come to show us that He is in fact *the Way*. We need to give that hope and joy away. Don't worry, if you give it all away Jesus will make more. Your supply is His supply; your joy is made complete!

But then it says that every high place must be brought low in preparation for the King. Every mountain and hill is to be made level.

Every mountain and hill made level

Now if you are not very familiar with the Old Testament stories you might not know that much about the high places that Isaiah is speaking about. When I referred to the first 39 chapters of Isaiah being filled with warnings, a good portion of that had to do with the nation of Israel's habit of joining the Canaanites and Moabites in going up to the high places and mountains to erect idols and to worship Baal and Asherah. These high places were not good references. There was one faithful King of Judah and he tore down the high places. We read about it in 2 Kings during the time of Isaiah:

2 Kings 18:1-4

"In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah, king of Israel, Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign. ² He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem.

His mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah. ³ And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done. ⁴ He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it."

You will never be prepared for Christmas if in your heart there are high places that Jesus wants you to tear down. Places of false worship and places of false hope. It is so easy in this world to put your hope in other lesser gods. Gods of education and the god of the paycheck. Or placing your security in a relationship that cannot satisfy the eternal longing we have inside of us for God. You can tell where your gods are by where your time and money go. It is the investment of time and money that these little gods demand. But don't be deceived, the true God wants more! He demands your life, your all! This little baby King has demands upon your life and rightly so. The very Word of God incarnate, made flesh. This is the Word that spoke and caused creation to happen. He created you, he knows you and he owns you. Twice now if you, like Paul, have since yielded to this truth and become a bond servant of Jesus Christ.

You will need to think about this last point. Usually one or two gods come to mind, but hidden inside most of us are connections to hopes and dreams that we have let manage and influence our expectations. My expectations need to be on Christ and in Christ and Christ alone. So it is time to give away Christmas, especially those things that compete for your allegiance to Jesus.

Give away Christmas – Especially those things that compete for Christ's attention!

It is a busy season but in order to face the truths of this message, you will need time to reflect. You will need to, like me, stop and consider whether I have made a straight path for the King to have access to my heart or if I have made it by my lifestyle almost impossible to let Him rescue me. I will need time to reflect on the hopes and joy and peace that are mine reflected in this season of giving if I have any hope of living leaving the valleys of my doubt and earthly concerns and instead live my life on the sure footing of Christ's love. You will need time to reflect on the Christmas story to hear the glad tiding of great joy that demand that you only hear His voice, that you only obey His voice amidst all the other nagging and distracting voices in our head of competing little gods.

Are you prepared for Christmas?

Let's listen to it one more time and not take it for granted. Listen to it while I read it slowly. You can close your eyes if it helps to let the rich imagery of the birth of Christ take you to a different time and a different place.

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.

⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest,

and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Prayer