

More Than Just a Manger

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It's a holiday. So it means different things to different people. And let's just think about that for a minute. And maybe I could request from you.

What are some of the things that Christmas means to people? Just name some. You don't have any idea.

Family and friends. Family and friends. There we go. All right. Just getting together, family and friends. And I agree. That's a meaningful part of this holiday for me. And that doesn't always work out that way, does it?

[1:37] Sometimes we aren't able to get all the family together. Thankfully, the Coleman family is going to all be together this Christmas. So we're excited about that.

So what else does it mean? Vacation time off. Vacation time off. Okay. All right. Okay. Maybe you could think about some things that are more attached to Christmas than just holiday.

About the birth of Christ. All right. Birth of Jesus Christ. All right. There's a good one. You know, that's kind of the quintessential answer. You know, in a Sunday school class, no matter what question, the answer is Jesus.

It's Jesus. And that is the right answer, by the way, to this. But it does mean other things. How about presence? All right. There you go. Giving and receiving of presence.

What's that? Helping others. All right. Having the opportunity to just be giving not only presence but of our time.

[2:46] And, of course, a lot of people involved in that. How about cooking? I'm going to have to name some here because I have a list here. I want to make sure that if you don't give me all these, I'm going to tell them to you.

Cooking. Now, that's not something that I do at Christmas, but I am the, you know, the beneficiary of that. I guess I do expect that.

And I expect certain things, you know, at Christmas. Now, certain kinds of foods. Family traditions. Family traditions. All right. Nobody's mentioned Santa Claus.

All right. Santa Claus and elves and reindeer. And that's, that, to many people, that's what Christmas is. All right. I like all the good cheer that starts spreading around.

All right. All right. There is a different kind of atmosphere about people. It's more joyful. I mean, with most.

[3:48] I mean, there is the flip side to that. Shopping. You know, you haven't mentioned that. You know, do you like to shop around Christmas time?

I like to shop anytime. You know, it's funny. The ladies are going like this. The guys are going like this. Well. Wrapping. Wrapping of the presents. And that is traditionally my job.

I don't know why that is. It's hard. Yeah. I know it. It takes me all night. Watching is a wonderful life. Watching is a wonderful life. It's a wonderful life. Man, you are a man after my own heart.

It's a wonderful life. How many have you watched that this season? Yes. Not yet? I haven't. But I'm going to get it out. I've got it on DVD. All right.

There are music events. And specifically our choir. And that is something a lot of people in the community are engaged in.

[4:48] Whether it's their church or attending another church. And it's amazing. You know, you see all the billboards. There are so many different things that are going on out there. Decorating.

That means something. Nativity scenes. And, of course, a lot of parties. All right. I think that's the last on my list.

So, the point is that Christmas really does mean a lot of different things to different people. And those things we've mentioned. And those things we've mentioned, really, I don't think anything we've mentioned would represent a really bad thing. And probably all of those things are part of, to some degree, the way we celebrate this particular holiday.

[5:44] Now, the real meaning of Christmas, and that was mentioned over here by Shirley. And everybody here knows that it's really all about the birth of Jesus. It's always amazing to me, you know, how it has become everything but that.

In the way most in our culture in America celebrate it. But it's all about that. The real significance of Christmas is, then you fill in the blank, the incarnation of the Son of God.

That's what this is. What we're celebrating. We're not really, per se, celebrating the way he came so much, even though it's awesome and wonderful.

And we all have kind of this image in our minds about the nativity and what it probably looked like. And we're probably all wrong about what it looked like.

I'm sure it was very difficult. But it is, what we're celebrating is the incarnation. God becoming a man. And that's what happened there on that very first Christmas.

[6:53] But, as awesome as that is, and significant as that is, it's really only the beginning of the story. The incarnation is just the beginning of the story.

Right? It really is. And so, Christmas, you'd have to agree, when we really think about it, is much, much, much, much, much bigger than just Away in the Manger.

Or It Came Upon a Midnight Clear. Even though I like those little carols that we sing and some others that focus on the birth of Christ, the nativity.

It's much bigger than that. And that's just the beginning. And really, the story needs to be told in its entirety, even at Christmas. As a matter of fact, it was, I think, as I recall, I didn't jot it down here, but it wasn't for maybe four centuries after the birth of Christ that the church began to celebrate the birth of Christ.

The focus was not on the birth. The focus was on what? Resurrection. On His death and resurrection. And so, for four, I think, I'm pretty sure for nearly four centuries, there was no Christmas holiday or celebration.

[8:22] And yet, it's not wrong to celebrate the birth of Christ. But, we need to keep, always keep in our minds that it's just part of the story.

It's not the whole thing. And we need to tell the story in its entirety, even this time of year. And so, I try to do that in my preaching, one time or another, to bring all of it together, not just His birth, but also His death, burial, resurrection, and beyond that.

And that's what we're going to do here tonight, if I'll ever get around to it. And so, what we're going to do, I'm going to do is describe the scenes of Christmas.

There are five of them. Five scenes of the Christmas story. And, you know, we travel around in our communities. And just, you know, whether it's just traveling to and from work, you're driving through neighborhoods, and you see the decorations.

And people all around our neighborhood put out lights, primarily, if nothing else. But, when you travel around, you sometimes see various scenes that have been put up.

[9:34] Sadly, most of them are not nativity scenes, but other kinds of scenes. As a matter of fact, it reminds me, when I was a kid, and I would, we would visit my grandparents quite often.

And they lived up in kind of the central part of Missouri then. They're with Jesus now. But, they used to take us over to Franklin, Missouri. And there was a fellow over there who was big time into decorating for Christmas.

And he not only had his yard, but he had a big field beside his house. And as the thing grew, as I understood, year after year, it would just get bigger and bigger. And you've heard of these kind of things.

That it extended across the street. And, I mean, it was incredible. I don't know how much money he spent in electricity, but you've never seen so many lights just in one particular man's yard on his property.

And he had, you know, different scenes. Everything imaginable. I mean, from elves to Elvis.

[10:42] I mean, he even had Elvis, you know, there as part of his Christmas decoration. It was really kind of neat to see, you know. And so, when you're kind of driving around, and you see all

these different scenes of Christmas, if you really want, and I've thought about doing this.

I probably never will. But if you really want to tell the whole story of Christ at Christmas time, then you would need to put in your yard five scenes.

Five scenes. And they would go in pretty logical order. Scene number one would be a God incarnate scene.

A God incarnate scene. All right, that's the one that we normally think of around Christmas time. In John 1.1, which speaks to the incarnation.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

[11:50] And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. And then when you skip on down to verse 14, and the Word, this Word that John was speaking about here, that was in the beginning and is God, this Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten Son, only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

That's the incarnation. And that's a good Christmas text, by the way. And then Luke 2.11, of course. That familiar part of a very familiar story in the Bible, Luke 2.

But in verse 11, So we can just kind of picture that.

And so there's the nativity, and that stable, and the manger, and there's the little baby Jesus lying there. And when you put John 1.1, or John chapter 1, and those passages I read, put that together with what the angel said to the shepherds, then you understand that the little baby in that cradle, or in that manger, which served as the cradle, was God in human flesh.

God incarnate. And that's the scene that we typically celebrate this time of year. Now, he was visited while he was there by those shepherds, right?

[13:31] They came to visit him. They did find him there, just as the angels said they would. And so they witnessed that. And, of course, in nearly all of our nativities that we may set up in our home, and I think Sherry has about 120 of them spread around the house.

We always have the wise men there, too. But the shepherds came to visit, but the wise men, when the wise men, and I want to make a point here, I'm going to make this point in every scene.

When the wise men came to visit Jesus, the manger was empty. The manger was empty. They came to see Jesus, of course, some five, six months later. It went out about that long.

Anyway, they weren't in the stable. They were in a house, the Bible says very clearly. And now, the manger was empty because they had moved out of the stable, but that, I think, is a fitting transition for the next scene because Jesus did not stay in the manger.

And that is, he didn't remain that sweet little Jesus boy, did he? In fact, if you go by our house, we have kind of a different kind of manger scene.

[14:50] And we have a little manger there, and it's empty. There's no baby in there. I didn't put a little doll out there. The manger's empty. Don't keep Jesus in the manger.

He's not there anymore. He left that smelly stable with all the barnyard animals there. I'm assuming they were there, even though the Bible doesn't tell us that. But he did grow up.

And he became a man, and he ministered and preached and performed miracles to validate his true identity. And he died for our sins.

And so, I say this is a good transition to the next scene because not only is the story of Christmas a God incarnate scene, but it is also, and you may not enjoy this one, but it is a gory scene.

Only because I just have to have a literature outline. I'm sorry. I'm hopeless. But a gory scene. All right?

[15:59] John 19, 9. Read that to you. 19, verse 1, rather. So then Pilate took Jesus. See, he's not in the manger here.

He's a man. He's been arrested. Been accused of blasphemy. And Pilate took Jesus and scourged him.

And don't get the idea that they just kind of whipped him a little bit. They scourged him to the very edge of death.

In fact, many died in that day from just the scourging they gave Jesus. And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns, put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe.

Then they said, Hail, King of the Jews. And they struck him with their hands. And, you know, John is just giving us a very brief little description, just kind of a synopsis of what took place.

[17:07] And so it kind of leads many of us to have this mistaken idea that maybe his persecution and his punishment and his torture was maybe not that big of a deal.

And every one of us have in our minds pictures we've seen of Jesus hanging upon a cross with just a little trickle of blood rolling down his forehead. But that was not the idea, not the reality.

I believe Jesus was scourged to the very edge of death, beaten so that his own mother could barely recognize him.

In fact, if we take Isaiah's prophecy and understand the full extent of it when he said that his appearance, his visage, was marred more than any man, that he barely looked human, Jesus, I mean, listen, the cross, even before he got to the cross, he was a bloody mess.

And hanging upon that cross, as they nailed him on that cross, rammed that spear into his side, and the crown of thorns on his head, and he was beaten and whipped.

[18:25] It really was a gory scene. Now, I'm not suggesting that if you're going to take my idea and set up all five scenes in your yard next Christmas that you ought to have some cross hanging out there with some bloody mannequin hanging up there, because the point I need to make again is that just as the manger's empty, after the crucifixion, the cross was empty.

Right? So, you can put an empty cross, because it is empty. Jesus is not a little baby boy anymore in the manger, that cute little kind of serene scene with a cute little baby there, and he grew to be a man, and he died for our sins.

Died a cruel death on the cross, but he's not on the cross either, because they buried him. And so that brings us to the third scene. That would be... It would be a good word.

It starts with G. A grave scene. Thank you very much, Mike. Predictable, isn't it? Very predictable. The grave scene. So you're in chapter 19 already, if you turn to it, now listen to verse 38.

After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission.

[19:56] So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury.

Now in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden, a new tomb, in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus because of the Jews' preparation day for the tomb was nearby.

All right? So we can kind of picture that scene. And at Easter time, quite often, you know, with church choir, passion plays and musicals and movies we might see, we can kind of picture the tomb there of the Lord Jesus Christ.

All right? Now we'll make the same point again because on the first day of the week, after he was buried, died and buried, guess what? They found the tomb empty.

Found the tomb empty. And so just as the Son of God is not a baby in a manger any longer, the manger is empty, and just as the Son of God is not perpetually hanging upon a cross, as some faiths believe, one particular one, the cross is empty.

[21:19] And likewise, the tomb could not keep it. And so the tomb is empty. Scene number four. A going scene.

A going scene. Luke chapter 24. I'm not too far here. Luke chapter 24, verse 51. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, of course this is after the resurrection and His appearances to the disciples, and now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven and they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple praising God.

And then Luke ends with the word Amen. Amen. Alright, so, after the going scene, then, and that's what we have described here, He's going.

He's going, going, gone. And so I would keep the same kind of theme here. After the going scene, the earth, then, was empty of His physical presence or His physical person.

Remember what He said to Mary when Mary had her encounter with Jesus there near the tomb, and she didn't recognize Him, of course, at first.

[22:48] And then she was clinging to Him and said, don't cling to Me. Don't hold on to Me because I must go to My Father. He's going. He's not going to stay. And it would have been great if, I'm sure the disciples would have said it would have been great if He had just stayed, you know, but

He needed to go.

And why did He need to go? Why has the going scene so important? The Holy Spirit. Alright, let the Holy Spirit come. And that must happen first.

Also, in 1 John 2.1, it says, if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father. Christ Jesus, the righteous. And Hebrews 9.24, that Christ entered heaven to appear in the presence of God for us. So, He is our intercessor. He's at the right hand of the throne of God. And we need Him to be there to intercede for us, to pray for us.

So, a panorama of scenes, isn't it? We have a God incarnate scene, the nativity, but it's empty. The gory scene, the cross, but it's empty.

[24 : 04] The grave scene, the tomb, and it's empty. The going scene, and He's gone. The ascension. And you put all these together, and what do you have?

You really have the gospel message as Paul put all of them together in 1 Corinthians 15. He said, For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures.

But now, is the story over? Not yet. Luke tells us that on Jesus' last day on this earth, that He gave His great commission to the church, to His disciples, to His church.

Gave the great commission to us. And in Acts 1, verse 9, Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up.

This is the same record that Luke gave. And this is Luke again writing. He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And then Luke records a little bit more, because that's the going scene.

[25 : 26] In verse 10, And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by Him in white apparel, who also said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven?

This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven. Alright, so the last scene then is a glory scene.

A glory scene. Revelation 1, verse 7. Behold, He is coming with clouds.

He left, clouds took Him up, and He's coming with clouds. And every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him even so.

Amen. And Revelation 19, verse 11. And I saw, or 19, where am I? Now I saw heaven open, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on Him was called Faithful and True.

[26 : 29] And in righteousness He judges and makes wars. His eyes were like flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself.

He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called the Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.

Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And there's the glory scene.

Now, let's put all this together. It's good that we celebrate the birth of Jesus. It's good to do that. But let's not leave Him in the manger. And it's good that we proclaim the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, but don't leave Him on the cross either.

[27 : 34] And don't leave Him in the tomb. And because He's sitting where? At the right hand of the throne of God and He's interceding for me. But guess what?

He's not going to stay there either. Because one day He's coming. coming again to this earth. And when He comes, He's going to come to judge and to reign forever and ever.

And let me tell you how to be ready for that. And this is what you can tell others. How they can be ready for this glory scene that one day is going to occur. You know how to be ready for that?

Let Him reign in your life now. Let Him reign in your life now. And He's the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And so, the story, His story includes all of these things.

Really, doesn't He? The God incarnate scene, the glory scene, the grave scene, the going scene, and one day the glory scene. The God incarnate scene, the grave scene.

[28 : 29] The grave scene, The grave scene. Thank you.