

Christmas Eve, Saturday. December 24, 2016

Isaiah 9:2-7

Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-20

### The Christmas Experience

Is it Christmas yet? How many sleeps do we have until it is Christmas? No doubt some of our younger relatives and friends have been asking these questions for the last week or so. Time seems to have stretched out since last Saturday with the children and youth still in school until Friday. Yet they still ask- is it Christmas? How do you know when it is Christmas? Or maybe I should ask this question a different way? Have you begun the Christmas Experience?

I am not referring to the experience of shopping in store, on line or wherever there is something for sale. I am not referring to the special concerts or programs held at schools and in the community. I am not referring to gatherings being held in this last month which were named Christmas parties and Jesus wasn't mentioned. I am referring to the experience of meeting the Spirit of Christ again or for the first time in a while. The Christmas Experience is when we have a feeling or sensation that God has ordained for us which calls us to communion and community with Him and with those whom we share special moments or experiences together. The Christmas Experience is different for each person because of our own needs, wants, desires from God and because each of us is not the same as we were last Christmas at this time nor will we be the same next year.

Christmas will be different this year for many people and for many reasons- we are each a little older. Each of us has aged in the last year—for some who are younger this is anticipated but as we get older there seems to be more aches and pains. And for the younger ones—they might not have been born—so yes—Christmas will be different. And this is good. Circumstances in our lives change and so do we if we truly have asked Christ to help and guide us through all the challenges we have faced and continue to face- together.

There is a story about a little boy who had always wanted to go to a circus. One day he was walking down the street and he saw a poster in a window. The poster said that a circus was coming to town and that a ticket to the circus cost \$3 dollars. The boy ran home and asked his father for the money to go to the circus the following week. His father told him that if he would work hard and get all of his chores done, he would give him the money for the ticket. The young boy did all his chores as promised and the father gave him the money needed. The boy headed into town filled with excitement

about seeing the animals, the trapeze artists and all that came with a circus. He arrived early in town and so he watched in awe as the circus parade started down the main street. He was thrilled when all the acts walked by. At the end came the clowns who were so funny that the boy laughed out loud even when he got squirted by water. At the end of the parade was the ringmaster. Seeing the ringmaster, the young boy ran out into the street and gave the \$3 to him. "Thanks, Mister," said the boy, "that was a great circus." The boy then turned and walked home. He did not know what he had missed. He thought he had been to the circus but he had only been to the parade.

What about your Christmas experience? Are all your decorations up and lights twinkling on the tree? Do you have all the gifts wrapped and ready? Is the turkey ready for stuffing and cooking? Is the house tidy for guests to come? Do you have enough candy and snacks for everyone? Are you ready for Christmas Day? What would it take to truly experience Christmas differently? Sometimes we might think that advent does not help us prepare for Christmas because what we really do is extend the celebration longer and worry and stress or fret about it all. Or maybe we have focused too much on the parade of activities in this last 4 weeks instead of the actual event of being one with each other in the presence of Jesus Christ. Maybe we just get caught up in our ideas of what Christmas should be when in reality Christmas just is.

What is Christmas? We read the story from Luke 2—the birth of a baby in a stable, placed in a manger by Mary and Joseph and worshiped and adored by shepherds. These shepherds learned of the baby's birth through the song of angels and they went to the stable worshiped and left rejoicing telling others of what happened.

What is Christmas? Hearing again the story of Jesus' birth and striving to make connections with the baby who was born to die and rise again. Hearing again of God's gifts given through this baby—hope, peace joy and love.

What is Christmas? Being with ones you love and missing those who are sharing this special time with Jesus in heaven. It is also remembering Christmas experiences of the past as good memories even though tears may flow and laughter be shared when these stories are shared.

What is Christmas? God's promise being fulfilled through the birth of the baby who is called the Christ/ Messiah. Son of God, Alpha and Omega....with many other names.. And the celebration of this is why we are here tonight- to remember, to offer praise and thanksgiving to God to experience God's

Spirit, moving amongst us. Let us take a moment to breathe in /out and relax, knowing that as we do this, we are receiving God's Spirit within and sharing it one another.

In a few moments we will share in the lighting of candles. When these candles are lit what will you be thinking about? –a baby's cry, angels singing; snow falling, bright Christmas star, What will you be feeling? Peace, hope, joy, love? And what will you be praying about? And will Christ be present for you?

The parade is over. It is now time to have the Christmas experience. Amen.