

Keep A Christ Centered Christmas  
Luke 1:46-55  
December 13, 2009

When I was a kid I enjoyed watching all the special Christmas TV shows. From the Charlie Brown Christmas to How The Grinch Stole Christmas, I would watch them all.

It's amazing that 40 plus years later many of those shows are still on the air. I'll confess that if they are on and I'm home, I will watch them. Just last week I watched old Charlie Brown buy that poor little Christmas tree for the umpteenth time.

The one pet peeve I have about these shows is that they air them so soon. There are still almost 2 weeks until Christmas and most of the specials have already been shown.

Not all the Christmas shows are golden oldies. Several weeks ago they aired "A Madagascar Christmas". It is an animated show that follows the characters that were in "Madagascar" the movie. Basically, the show is about a lion, a hippo, a giraffe and a zebra trying to get from Madagascar to New York City.

In the TV special, Santa's sleigh gets shot down on Madagascar. Santa got bumped on the head and does not know who he is. It is up to the animals to deliver the presents. In the panic about Santa's amnesia, one of the characters says, "without Santa there will be no Christmas".

Implied in the plot is the message that Christmas is about Santa and presents. Children who watch this show learn to equate Christmas with gifts. It's not just the Madagascar special; there are many other Christmas shows that convey the same idea.

The challenge for us Christians is to put the emphasis on the baby in the manger and not the big guy in the red suit. Given the pressure of the culture it is not an easy task.

I am in the midst of a sermon series that I call “The Christmas You’ve Always Longed For”. Clearly with that title there is an assumption that we are not totally satisfied with the way we experience and celebrate Christmas.

A couple weeks ago I brought up the business of the season. Slowing down some, maybe a few minutes every day, can help us appreciate why we are doing what we are doing.

Last Sunday I introduced the Kingdom Assignment. I recruited 15 volunteers. Each individual was given \$100. They are to manage the money so as to expand God’s kingdom. Hildy Tyson took the money and bought baking ingredients. What ever she raises from her sale will go to a mission. In 90 days all of our volunteers will report on what they did with the money.

This morning I am suggesting we work at keeping a Christ centered focus this holiday. I intentionally used the word work because keeping Christ centered goes against the flow of the culture.

One way we can do this is with prayer. When we pray we focus on our thoughts and emotions and we share them with God. The more we pray the more aware we are of God and God’s activity in our lives.

Our lesson this morning is called the Magnificat, or “Mary’s Song of Praise”. Let’s just recall what has preceded this song. An Angel informs Mary she is going to be the mother of God’s son. She goes off to spend some time with her relative Elizabeth. Upon entering the house Elizabeth proclaims that Mary’s baby is indeed the Lord. Imagine Mary’s amazement when Elizabeth looks at her and says, “you are the most blessed of all women, and blessed is the child you will bear.”

Though we call the Magnificat a song, it really is a spoken prayer. Instead of quickly talking to Elizabeth about all these circumstances, what does Mary do? Mary decides to focus on God and what God is doing in her life.

Prayer is an excellent way to keep Christ centered. Another traditional practice that helps to keep us Christ centered is Bible reading. For those that are doing the reading through the Bible in a year that we started last January, keep doing what you are doing. If you are not doing any daily bible reading, begin tonight before you go to bed. Take your Bible and read the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Chapters of Luke. Every night read two more chapters. If you do this you

will read through the entire book of Luke by December 23. Just imagine how much more meaningful the celebration of Jesus' birth will be having just read about his life, his death and his resurrection!

Besides prayer and Bible reading there are other things we can do. In our home decorations, we can create either an advent wreath, or a nativity set. It doesn't have to be elaborate. If we put it in a spot where we will see it often, then we will be reminded that Jesus is the reason for the season.

Speaking of that phrase, I have another visual reminder to help us keep Christ centered this month of December. I have a pencil for everyone here. On the pencil are the words "Jesus is the reason for the season". Maybe you can use the pencil when filling your Christmas cards, or putting names on gift tags. The pencil will again, remind us why we are doing this.

I began by talking about those Christmas specials. I mentioned two by name; do you remember which ones they were? A Charlie Brown Christmas and How the Grinch Stole Christmas. What I like about those two shows is that they convey the message that Christmas is not about stuff. I know I shared this card last year, but let me play for you again this part from Charlie Brown.

(I played the segment of the show where Linus tells part of the Christmas Story to Charlie Brown.)

As for the Grinch, you remember the scene? He is about to dump the sleigh full of stuff off the mountain when he hears who's singing.

I close in the style of Dr. Seuss.

Christmas is just a mere 12 days away,  
When that day arrives, what will we all say?  
I'm stressed, I'm broke, I'm tired and I'm weary,  
Or my Christ centered focus has made this day  
Merry!

But the sound wasn't *sad!*  
Why, this sound sounded *merry!*  
It *couldn't* be so!  
But it WAS merry! VERY!

He stared down at *Who*-ville!  
The Grinch popped his eyes!  
Then he shook!  
What he saw was a shocking surprise!

Every *Who* down in *Who*-ville, the tall and the small,  
Was singing! Without any presents at all!

He HADN'T stopped Christmas from coming!  
IT CAME!  
Somehow or other, it came just the same!

And the Grinch, with his Grinch-feet ice-cold in the snow,  
Stood puzzling and puzzling: "How *could* it be so?"  
"It came without ribbons!" "It came without tags!"  
"It came without packages, boxes or bags!"  
*Then* the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before!  
"Maybe Christmas," he thought, "*doesn't* come from a store.  
"Maybe Christmas . . . perhaps . . . means a little bit more!"