

Scripture:

Isaiah 9:2-7

Luke 1:26-38

Luke 2:1-20

“And so this is Christmas....”

“And so this is Christmas  
and what have you done  
another year over  
and a new one just begun.

And so this is Christmas  
I hope you have fun  
the near and the dear one  
the old and the young.”

So begins the song --- “Happy Christmas/ War is Over” written by John Lennon and Yoko Ono originally released in 1971.

“And so this is Christmas  
and what have you done  
another year over  
and a new one just begun.”

This is a good question for us this evening.

It's Christmas ----- and we're here in the house of God singing carols -----  
praying ----- and reading scripture about angels ---- shepherds --- and a  
young family and their baby.

And most importantly we're here in the house of God ----- celebrating the  
birth of that little baby boy --- Jesus of Nazareth --- born in a manger --- in  
the little town of Bethlehem --- and would one day be the Christ.

The question is ---- what have we done --- since last Christmas Eve?

If we eat three meals a day we've eaten almost 1100 meals since last  
Christmas Eve.

We've probably had a half a dozen hair cuts maybe more --- I like to get it cut about once a month --- so I've had 12 or so since last Christmas Eve.

Some of us have been to the grocery store hundreds of times ---- the mechanic 2 --- 3 maybe more times --- depending on how much we drive and how old our vehicle is.

We've been to the dry cleaners so many times ----- the pharmacy such and such amount of times and so on and so on.

But hopefully over the past year there are also a few far more memorable and important things we've done as well.

The gospel of Jesus Christ ----- whose birth day we celebrate this evening and tomorrow especially ---- is all about growth and change ---- transformation even ---- which is radical change.

The Christian Church and its foundation ----- the life --- death ----- ministry --- and resurrection of Jesus Christ ----- is all about change ---- finding better and more faithful ---- God directed ways --- to live and to relate.

Hopefully since last year at this time we have all discovered things about ourselves that we've tried to improve on ----- and perhaps even succeeded in some regards.

The person whom we celebrate every year at Christmas wants us all to be better people --- more faithful people ---- growing in our understanding of ourselves ---- of each other --- and in our understanding of Him kind of people.

We as human beings sometimes get preoccupied to a fault with things that in truth matter very little --- sometimes our main concern is simply to live longer --- longer here on earth ----- instead of better and more faithful.

Living better ----- more faithfully --- more Christ like ----- is the focus of the Christian ----- and not necessarily longer in terms of our time here on earth.

Christ comes and says to us all ----- “Forget about seeing your existence from birth date to death date --- because in me --- you will live long past what you know as death.”

Instead He invites ---- encourages ----- and equips us ---- to focus on improvement --- bettering ourselves ----- discerning a clearer and clearer understanding and appreciation of who we are ----- who He is ---- and the plan that God in store has for each and every one of us.

Walking in the light of Jesus Christ ----- is a forever journey ----- it doesn't end at death date ----- it transitions to another dimension at our so called “death date” and moves to the heavenly places that Jesus tells us about in John's gospel --- chapter 14.

And so tonight as we look at the flowers -----the decorations --- the trees ---- --- the candles ---- with the Christ candle --- the light of the world in the middle around which everything else moves --- and find meaning.

And so tonight as we look around and take in the familiarities of Christmas - -- it's easy to romanticize ---- and perhaps even get a little misty eyed --- and sentimental.

And tomorrow as we gather with family and friends ----- eat a great meal --- - and open gifts and get some things we really want and perhaps even need.

Hopefully we can push past the familiar --- and also move into the hope --- and joy ---- and love of Christmas.

The hope we find in Christ.

The joy we find in Christ.

And the love we find in Christ ---- God sending Him to take away any final and lasting power of evil --- sin --- and death.

Maybe we can even push ourselves a little and ask ---

“And so this is Christmas  
and what have we done?  
another year over

and a new one just begun.”

God has acted decisively in Jesus Christ coming as a baby boy in a stable who will grow up to be the one who fulfills God’s great rescue plan of salvation for all who really want it.

God’s already done all of this ---- secured our salvation and life past the grave --- but --- the question is how have we responded?

What have we done --- in the mean time?

What have we changed about ourselves since last year at this time --- for example.

Praise God that somehow --- despite the secular culture encroaching upon much of what the church holds on to ----- and shares with the world.

Praise God that somehow Christmas for many is still all about Jesus. ----- as we all bear witness to tonight by gathering here instead of somewhere else.

Jesus came to save us from our selves and from our tendency to be sloppy and self consumed --- overrun by sin.

In a sense He came to say:

---- wake up ----- and look up

-----consider others more

--- do what is best and right and faithful instead of always just what is easiest

----- do as God would have you do instead of just what you think is right.

And of course He not only talked about this --- but He lived it out ---- so that we would see by example how it is that God intends us to spend our time here on earth.

He shows us by example and not just theoretically --- how we can live in difficult situations and tricky circumstances.

That’s what we do here week in and week out ----- when we worship --- and study ----- and pray --- and talk with each other --- sharing our joys and challenges.

We thank God ---- we talk with God ----- as we try to figure out the best and most faithful way to live together so that when we are faced with difficult situations and tricky circumstances we have some guidance and some reference points instead of just scrambling about --- and relying on ourselves and our own limited perspectives.

On Christmas Eve --- it's no different.

We come together to thank God for sending us an example to follow ---- Jesus ----- instead of simply allowing us to continue to stumble and fumble along trying to figure it out on our own ----- because we can't.

Left to our own devices we've proven time and time again that we can find ways to make things messier and uglier.

“And so this is Christmas  
and what have you done  
another year over  
and a new one just begun.”

The one in whose name we come together tonight would undoubtedly want us to celebrate.

Jesus did after all say ----- “I came that they might have life and have it abundantly.”

The one in whose name we gather here tonight would also like us to continually strive to be better people --- more faithful people ----- living more in accordance with God's will.

And so as we come together ----- celebrate yes ----- and reflect.

Reflect on the grace ---- and the love --- and the compassion of God who gave us help --- who saved us from ourselves ----- who sent Jesus Christ that we might have life --- life abundant ---- and life everlasting..

Who sent Jesus Christ ---- that we might see by example that it is possible to do the right thing no matter how tight ---- or crooked ---- or demanding the situation might be.

My hope ----- God's hope --- is that next year as we come to Christmas Eve once again gather ---- we would all be able to say something like ---

“Me ----- I've changed” ---- “I've taken some steps ---- as tiny as they might be ---- I have taken steps --- I have heard and listened to God ---- I'm going to try to be more faithful ----- more Christ like.”

The Biblical story is not one of virtue rewarded or vice punished ----- instead it is the story of the relentlessly unmerited nature of God's love.

And so ---- as we celebrate Christmas let us remember:

God is good.

God is faithful.

God is just.

And He loves us ----- so much so that he came and dwelt among us in human form.

Far from abandoning us ----- God embraces us in Christ----- the one whose birth we mark year in and year out every December --- the one who came to rescue the whole of creation --- including each and every one of us here tonight.

And so this is Christmas!

This year may we move ----- even if ever so subtly ---- closer and closer to a life worthy of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The Good News that God that came ----- and continues to come every Christmas --- every day ----- in the person ----- the presence ---- and the influence of Jesus Christ.

To God be the glory now and forever.

Amen.