

Christmas Eve Evening Service 2017

Scripture:

Isaiah 9:2-7

Luke 1:26-38

Luke 2:1-20

“The second gift.”

The first gift of Christmas was not wrapped up in fancy paper --- or a gift bag ---- it had no bow.

It wasn't purchased on line --- or in a store --- or re-gifted.

The first gift of Christmas was a simple --- sacred ----- powerful --- life changing gift.

It wasn't gold.

It wasn't frankincense.

It wasn't myrrh.

It wasn't an I-pad.

It wasn't a Nintendo switch.

It wasn't a Fingerling --- or a Hatchimal.

And it wasn't a Sphero 2.0.

It wasn't a gift like any other.

It was a gift of love and life ----- and peace ---- and hope ----- and love and joy --- given by God.

And the second gift was exactly the same.

The first gift was Jesus Christ --- born in a stable ---- in a manger.

And we're pretty good at celebrating --- and we're pretty good at getting all ready for this first gift.

And we get ready by putting up trees --- decorating them.

And we get ready by putting up lights and all kinds of elaborate ornaments --
--- blow up figures on our lawns --- projection lights on our lawns --- and so
on.

Dioramas --- miniature --- and sometimes not so miniature scenes and
figures – also adorn many lawns this time of year.

And we get ready by buying presents and wrapping gifts.

And we get ready by sending out Christmas cards and letters.

And we get ready by buying food ---- preparing a menu --- inviting friends
and family over.

We're pretty good at preparing for and celebrating the first gift --- baby
Jesus.

But what about the second gift?

Are we any good at preparing for and celebrating the second gift of
Christmas?

And the answer is ---- not really ---- not so much.

And of course the second gift is exactly the same as the first gift.

The second gift ---- same as the first --- is Jesus Christ.

The first gift is baby Jesus coming in the manger ---- and the second gift is
all grown up Jesus coming at the end of time as we know it --- the second
coming.

So how good are we at preparing for and celebrating the second gift -----
the second coming?

And the answer is not all that good at all --- at least that is the case for many
if not most of us.

Thankfully there's help.

Thankfully we can change.

Thankfully this year can be different.

This year on Christmas Day.

This year during the 12 days of Christmas --- it's not just a song right --- the 12 days of Christmas is on account of the church calendar and not some secular song.

This year on Christmas Day --- this year during the 12 days of Christmas ---- this year --- tonight now --- instead of just thinking about the first gift --- the first coming of Christ ---- we can retrain our minds and hearts and dispositions to also celebrate the second gift and the second coming of Christ.

It's not too late.

It may be too late to prepare for the first gift at this point --- if you haven't already bought your gifts --- if you haven't already bought your food for Christmas --- it just may be too late.

Anybody here still have to go shopping tonight --- after this service? ----- come on ----- there must be at least one last minuter here.

It may be too late --- what if I ramble on for 2 or 3 more hours --- you took a chance leaving it this late and then coming here.

It may be too late to prepare for the first gift.

But ----- it's not too late to prepare for the second gift of Christmas --- because it is still yet to come.

And preparing for and celebrating the second gift of Christmas isn't so much about doing as it is about being.

Preparing for the second gift isn't about doing this and doing that.

Preparing for the second gift --- the second coming --- is much more about a disposition than it is an action or something to be done.

Submission --- obedience ---- reverence ----- humility --- dependency --- trust ---- giving over to God ----- these are the things we might want to think about this Christmas.

The poet Ann Weems ---- has a great book of poems for the Advent and Christmas seasons --- “Kneeling in Bethlehem”.

And in one poem ---- entitled “Had we been there” --- she writes.

“Into the stable they straggled --- poor and dirty
Hardly suitably dressed for polite society.

Had we been Joseph
we would have feared robbery.
Had we been Mary
we would have feared germs around our newborn.
Had we been God
these are not the ones we would have chosen
to first come and see the Child.

After all ---- they --- as in the shepherds who first showed up at the stable---
after all they showed a certain carelessness about the rules of the church.

And yet --- God chosen ---- they came
to kneel and worship him
He --- who would later be called the Good Shepherd.

Perhaps we could brush up on our humbleness.”

The last line is the real kicker for me.

“Perhaps we could brush up on our humbleness.”

Perhaps we can brush up on our humbleness.

Christmas isn't about us.

It's not about us getting more stuff --- eating more food --- having more fun.

Yippee look at me I'm having fun at Christmas.

That's not what Christmas is about.

It's about the gifts.

It's about the first gift ---- Jesus in the manger --- baby Jesus the first coming
---- and it's about the second gift ---- the full grown man Jesus --- the second
coming.

Christmas is about the gifts God gives us.

I think Weems is on to something ----- "Perhaps we could brush up on our
humbleness."

This Christmas may we humbly prepare for and celebrate the first and the
second Christmas gift --- especially the second.

Especially the one yet to come.

May every heart prepare Him room ----- Him the full grown man Jesus ready
to come for the second time.

Make this the year about preparing for the second gift.

Amen.