

Christmas Day 2018

When you came here to church today, what did you see on the way? Streets, houses, and store windows, glittering with lights and Christmas decorations. And maybe Santa on somebody's roof in his sleigh being pulled by reindeers - Rudolph lighting the way. Maybe you passed other churches, maybe you listened to Christmas music on your car radio?

And now that you're here, what do you see? A sanctuary filled with poinsettia plants, a Christmas tree all aglow, and a stable - with the baby Jesus in his crib; Mary, Joseph and the shepherds all around him. Let us not forget the animals who are helping to keep him warm. We sing old, familiar, hymns that bring back cherished memories and feelings of Christmas' past. But what if there were none of this?

What if there were no decorations, no hymns or organ music, no crib scene, no gifts, what if even the church disappeared? What if when we got home there was no sign of Santa anywhere around the house? No Christmas cards, no stockings hanging from the mantle, no tree, no presents.

What if there were no Christmas? Just another of the business—as— usual Tuesday workdays, and let us not forget, a school day? Perish the thought! But that's how our lives would be today if it were not for Jesus Christ.

Without Jesus Christ the Bible would have in it only what we refer to as the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures. It would end with the Book of the prophet Malachi. There would be no gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. No letters written by St. Paul and Peter. There would be no shepherds hearing glad tidings or kings bearing gifts. Christmas would just not be.

Do we appreciate what we've got? Are we really aware of what has happened? We seem to have come to take for granted people going to the moon and walking around in space, landing on Mars. These were dreams just a few years ago, but have become realities today. Wonders do happen. The greatest wonder, though, is what we are celebrating today.

Think of it. The God who created the world left His heaven and came to live with us. The Son of God actually became a human being. He lived with us for thirty-three years, trying to prove to us that God loves us.

And the most convincing way he thought he could do that was by dying for us. Had anyone ever dared dream of a God doing such a thing?

People's lives have been sacrificed for their gods, yes, but God dying for His people? Maybe that's why there are still so many in the world who don't believe it. It's not something anyone would expect. But that is what happened.

"In the beginning was the Word," writes John in his gospel; the Word was in God's presence, and the Word was God. . . Through him all things came into being, and apart from him nothing came to be. . .The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

From that day on the world began to change. Let us have no doubt, my friends, Christmas will be with us until the end of time.

"Silent Night," the strains of "O Little Town of Bethlehem," and "O Come All Ye Faithful," will always be around to warm our hearts.

What happened nearly 2000 years ago is real. And as a part of our celebrating we exchange gifts. That's the part we look forward to. But let us not forget a gift for whose birthday it is. Let's not forget a gift for Jesus.

God is giving you his Son. Jesus is giving you His life. What are you giving Him? You did bring Jesus something, didn't you? Or maybe it slipped your mind in the midst of all this getting ready for Christmas and getting to church on time. Don't get upset, there is still time.

The stores may be closed, but that's no problem. Because the gift that would please Jesus the most can't be bought in stores anyhow.

What he wants is your heart. The love in your heart to be more specific, and the promise to live your life for Him in the way He has asked you to. That's all Jesus wants. And no better gift can any of us find anywhere.

But each one of us must decide freely, on our own, if and what we are going to give Jesus. He doesn't want any forced gift, or a gift without love.

Jesus only enjoys receiving what we really want to give him from the depths of our hearts. We might need to be reminded of this before we decide. The gift of ourselves is more than a momentary gesture. It requires repeated renewal and daily commitment to live the way of Christ **EVERY DAY!**

What if there were no Christmas? What if there were no Jesus Christ? What if there were no God who loves us? But you see there is, and He does!

So, don't get frightened. This is all real. Long ago in the city of Bethlehem, a Savior was born to us. It is Jesus Christ the Lord. And he is still with us. Where? Just look at the person nearest to you and you'll see Him.

May the love of Christ fill your hearts this day and always!

MERRY CHRISTMAS!