

Christmas-Time Considerations

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, December 15, 2019

Main Theme – A message emphasizing elements of the Christmas story that we should PONDER

WORSHIP & PRAYER

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Special Events**
 - Friday, December 20 – Christmas Gathering w/ the C.Y.C. Children
 - Sunday, December 22 – Christmas Service (Invite Friends & Family)
- **Annual Business Meeting**

The 2019 Annual Business Meeting will take place on Sunday, January 19, 2020 following the Sunday Service. Nomination forms necessary to nominate individuals for the elected office of Deacon on our Church Board whose terms expire at the Annual Meeting will again be distributed today after service. The completed forms must be placed in the designated box (located on the front-foyer Welcome Table) TODAY. Also, the deadline for the submission of Ministry Leader Reports is Sunday, December 29, 2019.

MORNING OFFERING

At this time, I want to call forth our ushers.

- Thank you for your faithfulness in giving to the Lord/His work
- Your giving fuels the work of Christ in and through this church

May the Lord bless you as you give! May you experience His faithfulness in kind!

Luke 6:38 (NIV)

38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

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- **CHILDREN DISMISSED FOR CHILDREN'S CHURCH**
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INTRODUCTIONS

As always it is wonderful to see you. I look forward to these moments of corporate worship and instruction. I pray that you are ready to receive what the Lord has for you today. Please have your Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes.

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

This morning I want to operate from a rather simple, straightforward PREMISE: Christmas is something both significant and worthwhile. This is true—NOT just because of the elements commonly associated with it (e.g., gifts, parties, trees, etc.)—but because Christmas plays a vital ROLE in the life of the believer.

i.e., Christmas provides an annual opportunity to PONDER the import of Christ's Birth & Coming

NOTE 1 – As we have noted time and again, there is VALUE in remembrance and reflection. In the Old and New Testaments, God often directed His people to REMEMBER key moments and happenings in sacred history (e.g., Feasts of the Lord, Holy Communion, etc.).

NOTE 2 – Godly remembrances serve to . . .

- 1) Stimulate Faith (Trust in God Based Upon Past Victory/Provision)
- 2) Stimulate Gratitude (Celebratory Recognition for What He's Done)
- 3) Stimulate Humility (That Such a God Would Operate on OUR Behalf)
- 4) Stimulate Worship (Rightful Response of the Creation to the Creator)
- 5) Stimulate Transformation (Staves Apathy/Softens – Heart for Service)

KEY – Christmas provides an annual opportunity for us to remember (i.e., PONDER) a most significant happening: The Birth of Jesus Christ! **Q.** How many would agree this is worthy of prayerful contemplation?

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 2

FYI – It seems that Christmas has led the faithful to PONDER/REFLECT from the very beginning. As we open, let me take you back to the events of that FIRST Christmas—as it is recorded in the Gospel of Luke. I want to read a lengthy portion of Luke 2. Please note the following:

Luke 2:1–19 (NIV, Emphasis Mine)

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to their own town to register.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and **pondered** them in her heart.

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 3

Q. What did Mary do in light of the happenings of Christmas? (v. 19)

Luke 2:19 (Emphasis Mine)

19 . . . Mary treasured up all these things and **pondered** them in her heart.

Q. What does it mean to ponder?

A. To meditate upon; to reflect upon; to weigh carefully in one's mind; to consider deeply. The term speaks to a mental/spiritual rumination and deliberation.

NOTE –Of course, it is NOT clear how much Mary truly understood concerning the significance of Christ's appearing (hence the song *Mary Did You Know?*). She did NOT have the whole story as we do—she was living it out one day at a time. I have to wonder how much Mary pondered the happening of Christ's Birth in the days, weeks, months and years to follow.

KEY – Yet it is clear that from the very beginning, Christmas and the events thereof have caused people to ponder—and nearly 2,000-years later I believe that it STILL should! And to those of us who can access the full record and the entirety of the story, I want to bring out four timeless points that we should treasure up in our hearts and ponder.

LET'S DELVE IN...

POINT #1

To begin, let us ponder the REALITY of Christ's coming.

KEY – i.e., At a definite point in human HISTORY God became man.

NOTE – As I have mentioned before, many elements (many of them good and enjoyable) have become associated with Christmas (e.g., shopping, spending, gift giving/receiving, parties, etc. Yet when you cut through it all, the true REASON for the season remains the Birth of Christ.

Everything else PALES in comparison to that momentous truth that, nearly 2,000-years ago, something utterly unprecedented happened: God became man (i.e., Incarnation) that man might be brought back to God!

John 1:1–4, 14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. . . . 14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

FYI – To be clear, the story of Christ’s Birth (with accompanying events) is recorded by BOTH Matthew and Luke. I highly recommend that you take the time to read through the record yourself (maybe as a family on Christmas Morning).

KEY – It is one of the most fascinating and riveting STORIES in the whole of the Word.

If fact, the story of Christ Birth has ALL the hallmarks of a GREAT story! It is filled with drama, suspense, narrow escapes and close calls, diverse settings and landscapes, intriguing heroes, shameful villains and the supernatural!

KEY – But there is something important to note about the Christmas Story. At NO point are you allowed by the authors to believe that what you are reading is only a story. This isn’t *It’s a Wonderful Life* or *A Christmas Carol*. For example, when you read Luke 2:1–7...

Luke 2:1–7

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to their own town to register.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

...Scripture is NOT presenting a fairy-tale or a dream—but unalterable & unchangeable history.

2 Peter 1:16

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

KEY – Luke is dealing with real people, happenings and historical events. Christ REALLY came.

APP – Recognize the reality of Christ’s coming! This story is NOT the mere creation of a gifted author. Rather, it is a seminal event, recorded for all time—an event that you and I must properly respond to.

POINT #2

Let us also ponder the MYSTERY of Christ's coming.

Q. Have you ever held a newborn child?

There is something incredible about a new life. That child you hold is a wondrous creation of God AND that resident in that child are ALL the great human CAPACITIES (e.g., intellect, emotion, creativity, love, etc. – all wrapped in an adorable, innocent little bundle).

KEY – But as we ponder the Birth of Jesus, we must recognize something of a MYSTERY concerning the Christ-Child. When Mary and Joseph held Him in their arms, they held One that possessed all the CAPACITIES of God (e.g., holiness, omniscience, omnipotence, eternity, etc.) wrapped in a HUMAN FRAME (i.e., Hypostatic Union – Fully God and Fully Man).

John 1:1–4, 14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. . . . 14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Philippians 2:6–7

6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

Colossians 2:9

9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,

- 1) He Who Created All Was Born into His Creation
- 2) He Who is Eternal/Transcends Time Entered into Time
- 3) He Who is Almighty Laid Aside the In. Exercise of that Power
- 4) He Who is All-Knowing Was Made to Grow and Learn as We Do
- 5) He Who is Immortal Took Upon Himself a Truly Mortal Coil/Frame

NOTE – This is—again—the wonder of *Mary Did You Know?*

FYI – I CANNOT fully explain or comprehend such things. I'll NEVER fathom their fullness. But I believe and I REVEL in the mystery that is Christ. I glory in what He has revealed of Himself and trust Him wholly! I also believe that we do well to PONDER such things at Christmas!

POINT #3

Let us also ponder the MANNER of Christ's coming.

Philippians 2:6–7 (Emphasis Mine)

6 Who, being in very nature God,
 did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
 7 rather, he **made himself nothing**
 by taking the very nature of a servant,
 being made in human likeness.

KEY – I find it amazing that God became a man. I find it EVEN MORE amazing the TYPE of man Jesus became! i.e., One who was lowly; humble; given to service, etc.

Jesus could have been born into ANY family (e.g., a family of earthly wealth, acclaim and authority). He could have chosen a situation from which He could enjoy the BENEFITS of nobility, palaces and the praise of men.

Q. After all—Isn't He the King of Kings?

But He CHOSE to be born into the home of a common, peasant family. Prestige and the palace were the furthest things from this people. He chose the humblest of conditions and knew the RIGORS of life and living from day one (evidenced in the following):

Luke 2:6–7

6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

FYI 1 – Jesus was likely born in a CAVE near the inn. He was laid in the feeding trough of an animal (i.e., manger). I wonder what else was in that cave. That trough? Having had two infants in two years, I don't think I could/would have put the girls into that condition.

FYI 2 – Latter texts reveal that Jesus' family had little money. That He was raised in the humble home of a carpenter, in an obscure and demeaned village. He was born on the "wrong side of the tracks" as the old adage says—just like the vast majority of those born on planet earth!

KEY – Truly this gift of God Most High came in the most UNIQUE wrapping possible!

APP – This Christmas season take the time to ponder the manner of Christ's Coming. He took upon Himself not only the form of a man, but the form of the lowly—one who was called to serve. He came and truly lived among us (He knows what it's like to be you and me). I think these things should speak to how we live our lives!

POINT #4

Finally, let us consider the PURPOSE of Christ's coming.

KEY – As we reflect upon the reality, mystery and the manner of His coming, we cannot neglect the purpose of His Coming. God the Son was NOT sent arbitrarily, accidentally or haphazardly. He was sent with a divinely ordained purpose:

Matthew 1:18–21 (Emphasis Mine)

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, **because he will save his people from their sins.**"

NOTE 1 – From the very beginning, the purpose of Christ was made clear: Jesus came to save people from their sins. The Child who was placed in a manger was destined to be placed on the CROSS.

NOTE 2 – Christmas reminds us that a loving God came into this world—a world so broken by sin—to live among us, heal us, teach us, to love us, etc. And in the fulness of time the Child would give Himself on our behalf.

Philippians 2:8

8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

QUOTE – "If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist. But since our greatest need was forgiveness, God sent us a Savior." -Max Lucado

APP – This Christmas season take the time to ponder our need for a Savior. **Q.** Are there people in your world who don't know Him as Savior and Lord? SHARE Him! **Q.** Do you know Christ as your Savior and Lord? RECEIVE Him!

CONCLUSION

May this Christmas season be a time to ponder...

- 1) The Reality of His Coming**
- 2) The Mystery of His Coming**
- 3) The Manner of His Coming**
- 4) The Purpose of His Coming**