

There are many passages we could read for this Sunday concerning the birth of Christ, but the passage from Luke chapter 2 is one of my favorites. When I was a kid my knowledge of the Christmas Story came from TV. It was not until I became saved as an adult that I began reading the Bible and learned how some of the perceptions I had about Christmas were wrong. Reading from Luke chapter 2 about Joseph and Mary going to Bethlehem and Jesus birth in the manger is a beautiful image. The angel and hosts of heaven appearing to the shepherds in the fields is amazing. The shepherds obediently journeying to visit this special baby in the manger and then going forth to tell the whole town the glorious story that Jesus Christ is born is exciting. The Magi coming months later to worship Christ shows God's amazing plan unfolding as His directs. These images are a wonderful way to celebrate Christmas. Even though this Sunday is the day after Christmas we celebrate the birth of Christ and anticipate His return.

Many argued Luke chapter 2 was not accurate, there was no historical record of a census ordered by Caesar Augustus and therefore, the Bible was wrong. Historical records were devoid of evidence of a Roman decreed census. Part of the problem was there is a discrepancy in the Roman calendar as to when was year one. However, archeological and historical discoveries in the 20th century revealed the calendar discrepancy and the Roman census, thus verifying the truth of Luke chapter 2, ¹“[In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.](#)” ² [This was the first registration when Quirinius \(koo·ray·nee·os\) was governor of Syria.](#)” In 6 BC the Roman Empire deposed Herod Archelaus who had ruled the largest section of Judea and converted his territory into the Roman province of Judea. Quirinius was made Legate or governor of what was to be known as Roman Syria which included the province of Judea. As governor, he was ordered by Caesar Augustus to carry out a census in order to establish the tax basis for province of Judea-Syria that

would be paid to Rome. So, in 6 BC, as required by the provincial Roman governor, ³“all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” (Luke 2:1-7) As usual God orchestrated every detail of His plan for the salvation of the world to come about exactly as He decreed through His Son.

Well, even though it is the day after Christmas we have gathered to worship on this Lord’s Day in song, in prayer, in the Word of God and to focus on Christ at Christmas and fellowship just as the early church did and is recorded in Acts chapter 2.

We have spent 4 weeks working our way through the meaning of the Advent Wreath. It was disappointing that the last three Sundays we were not able to gather together for worship. But this Sunday we come together again and light the 5th candle – the Christ Candle. For our Advent messages on Sundays, we used the candles on the Advent Wreath as the themes for the sermons. The first advent candle represents hope, so the first Sunday of Advent we viewed **hope** found in the scriptures relating to Christmas and the Christmas story. The second candle represents peace, on the second Sunday we examined **peace** and how it relates to Christmas. Then we did the same for the third and fourth advent candles which represent **joy** and **love**.

You may have noticed there is one candle left, it is the center candle, called the **Christ Candle**. The Christ candle is saved for last and lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day or for us on this Lord’s Day. All the candles of Advent are now lit as we celebrate Christ who is the center of all creation and salvation.

The Christ candle is in the center because the Christ candle reminds us that Jesus is the center of Christmas. The four outer candles are all important, but they only make sense with Jesus at the center of all. Yes, Christmas is a time of hope, peace, joy and love, but once again, this is only because of Jesus. So, I want us to look at Christ as the center of Christmas and how we only have real hope, peace, joy and love in our lives because of Jesus. The scriptures reveal God the Father's plan for salvation, as Jesus said to those gathered, ¹⁶ **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.** ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” (John 3:16-21) My beloved we are called to be light in this dark world. To live with the hope, peace, joy and love of Christ in a world that does not know these gifts. The world does not know God and therefore it does not believe in Christ. The world desperately seeks hope, peace, joy and love and cannot find these because they do not believe in Christ as the Son of God and as Savior.

No Hope Without Christ

So, first let's talk about hope. Jesus is the center of Christmas because there is no lasting hope without Christ. When we assessed the advent candle of hope, we saw that hope in Christ sustains one through the waiting. We saw that hope in Christ helps one go the distance and run the race of life well. We observed that hope in Christ does not disappoint. ² **“Through Christ we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.** ³ Not only that, but we

rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ **and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.**" (Romans 5:2-5) All real hope in the world is centered on Christ.

We also learned that the whole advent season is about hope and anticipation. It is about the people of the Old Testament waiting all those long years for Christ to come. It is also about us who are waiting and longing for Christ's return. God promised to send Jesus the first time and He did. God has promised to send Jesus a second time and He will. Christmas is all about hope because it is all about Christ. Because God sent His Son into the world, you and I have hope. We have hope for today because Christ is with us. We have hope for tomorrow because Christ will never leave us. We have hope for eternity, because Christ is coming back to take us to be with Him forever.

Too many people live without hope today because they live without Christ. So, that is the first reason Jesus is the center of Christmas, because all real hope is found in Him. There is no real hope without Christ.

No Peace Without Christ

Secondly, Jesus is the center of Christmas because there is no peace without Christ. As we studied the advent candle of peace, we learned that Jesus brings peace to believers as a gift from God. Peace comes because for those who believe, Jesus came to save us from our sins so that we could be restored to right relationship with God. We understood Jesus brings peace to one's inner self – when one trusts Christ, they enjoy a wonderful peace in their heart, soul and mind. Christ gives each believer the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit and a personal peace that is unlike anything you can find in the world. We observed how Jesus brings peace with others – when you put Christ first and pray for your relationships, Jesus reconciles those relationships and allows you to live in peace with those around you. Then finally we saw that Jesus will bring peace on earth –

that when Christ returns, He will rule over this world in peace. All wars and conflicts will cease and even the world of nature and animals will be at peace with each other. All true peace in the world is centered on Christ alone.

Our world is sadly lacking peace today because our world is lacking Christ. The religious leaders of this world will not bring you peace. The political leaders of this world will not bring you peace. The pop psychologists of this world will not bring you peace. All the drugs and medication in the world will not bring you real peace. Only Jesus brings true and lasting peace. He is the Prince of Peace. He is the Savior who came to bring peace between you and God. He is the coming King who comes to reign in peace over all the earth.

The angels who announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds out in the fields sang songs of peace on earth, goodwill towards men. So, the second reason Jesus is the center of Christmas is because only Jesus brings true peace. There is no real peace without Christ.

No Joy Without Christ

The world confuses happiness, which is fleeting, with real joy found only in Christ. True inner joy comes through Jesus when He brings us salvation. Do you have joy? Why is this question important? Because there is no real joy without salvation and one mark of true salvation is joy. The joy of our salvation also leads one to proclaim; good news is for sharing and the joy found in sharing the Gospel of Christ also leads to the joy of praise. The world seeks happiness in the amassing of material things and it never lasts. Christians know true and lasting joy in all circumstances because they live in and for the glory of Christ.

When the angels announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds, they not only sang songs of peace in the sky. They proclaimed good news of great joy for all the

people. After the shepherds went to Bethlehem and found Jesus in the manger, they were so full of joy they ran out into the night to tell everyone that Christ was born. They could not wait until morning! They were so filled with joy they had to share the good news of Christmas and once they shared, they returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, amazingly everything was just as they had been told by the prophets and angels. This is the joy every believer experiences when they have salvation in Christ!

This world offers a lot of entertainment, a lot of excitement, a lot of thrills but very little joy. Joy is deeper than happiness. Happiness is temporary and dependent on circumstances. But Jesus offers you a joy that transcends your circumstances. Christmas is not always a happy time for people. Especially if we have lost someone close to us, it tints the beauty of the season for us. But Jesus offers you a joy that will sustain you even in your deepest sorrows. True joy does not mean you will never be sad. It means that even in your saddest hours, God is with you, you can trust Him and therefore you can have joy.

So, the third reason Jesus is the center of Christmas is because Jesus brings a joy that is deeper than happiness and even deeper than our sorrows. There is no real joy without Christ.

No Love Without Christ

Jesus is the center of Christmas because there is no real love without Christ. When we studied the advent candle of love, we saw Joseph's love for Mary as he looked out for her best interests even when he thought she had been unfaithful to him. We witnessed Mary's love for Jesus as she wrapped the baby in swaddling clothes and laid Him in the manger. God revealed His love for sinners by sending His own Son into the world as a sacrifice for their sins. Scripture tells us an outward sign of our true love for

Christ is evidenced in our love for others. A Christian's natural response to God's love is we love those, who like us, are often unlovable.

When I say that there is no real love without Christ, I am not saying that you cannot love your family or be loving towards others unless you are a Christian. There are many people who do not follow Christ who are still very loving people. But what I want to make clear is this; whether you realize it or not, your ability to love others is only possible because of Jesus, because Jesus is the Son of God, and you cannot experience or express fullness of love, especially agape love without Christ.

The Bible tells us that God is love and that all love comes from God. As the apostle John taught, ⁷“**Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.**” ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” (1 John 4:7-11) Before the Triune God created the world, there was always God and therefore there was always love. God the Father loved His Son Jesus and Jesus loved God the Father. God the Father and Jesus both loved God the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit loved the Father and the Son. God is love because from all of eternity there has always been a perfect relationship between the three persons of the Trinity – one God, three persons in a perfect relationship of harmony and love.

When God created the world the love God has for Himself in the persons of the Trinity spilled over onto us. It is like tracing a stream back to its source. You hike through the woods following the stream for hours until you find the lake or spring that is feeding the stream. When you see any act or expression of love in this world and you trace it back to the source, you will always find God – He is the wellspring. God is the

source of all love in this world. Every act of love in this world finds its source in Him. God is love and all love comes from Him. The story of Christmas is all about love, because Christmas is all about Jesus. Our goal should always be to live in peace and love with each other and we are enabled to love by the power of the Holy Spirit that dwells within.

The baby born in Bethlehem grew to be a man. He lived a perfect life with no sin. He went to the cross and died a horrible sacrificial death. The Bible tells us why Jesus did all this. He did it for you and for me because of His love for sinners. God sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. That is why Jesus came, not as just a prophet or teacher or healer – but the Savior of all those God calls. That is why He lived. That is why He died. That is why Jesus rose again – so He could be our Savior forever and rescue us from sin and Satan and death.

This is how God showed His love to all mankind, He sent His Son. So, we understand that the fourth reason Jesus is the center of Christmas, is because God is love, and all love comes from Him. There is no real love without Christ.

Let me close with an illustration to help us pull all this together. I love having a fire on cold winter days and especially at Christmas. There is something about a fire with its warmth and flames dancing – it is soothing and relaxing. What is it that people love about a fire in the fireplace? It is the whole experience, is not it? The light and glow of the fire, the warmth that the fire brings, the scent of the burning wood and the crackling of the embers – these all combine to make it such a beautiful experience. But you cannot have all those things without the fire. Watching the TV program that fills your screen with a fire is not the same. The things we love about the fire comes from the fire and the fire is at the center of the light, the warmth, the scent and the crackling.

It is the same with Christ at Christmas. We all want hope, peace, joy and love, but some people seem to want them without Jesus. It is like wanting the light, warmth, scent

and crackling of the fire in the fireplace without the fire. It does not work that way. Just as the fire is central to all the good things about the fire, so Christ is central to Christmas. Hope, peace, joy and love come from Him. Jesus is the center of all creation, and we only enjoy the good things of Christmas because of Him.

As you observe the Christ candle in the center of all the other candles, remember that Christ is central. He is the reason for Christmas. He is the one who brings true hope, peace, joy and love for us all. Let us draw near to Him to worship, to praise, to follow and believe. O come let us adore Him! O Come Let Us Adore Him! O COME LET US ADORE HIM! HE IS CHRIST THE LORD!!! Amen!