

What is the Message of Christmas?

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By Rev. Timothy B. White

The morning of Thanksgiving Day, I walked into Fred Meyer, and the first thing I heard were the words of a familiar Christmas song sung by Andy Williams -- "It's the most wonderful time of the year." Thankfully for our family, Christmas time has had a lot of "wonderfulness" about it, but it hasn't always been free of difficulty or challenges.

Three Christmases ago, my wife, our youngest son, and I spent Christmas in the visitors' lounge of the Intensive Care Unit. We slept there for two nights. The good news was that our oldest son received a heart transplant two days earlier. The not-so-good news was discovering, on Christmas eve (when he woke up), that he had suffered a stroke that took out his right side and his ability to speak. It was the best of times and the worst of times for our family. Thankfully, he recovered most of what he lost and is progressing well. Thanks be to God.

The True Message of Christmas

Christmas has little to do with the number of gifts under the tree, although there's nothing wrong with giving and receiving gifts. But what is the true message of Christmas? Many Christmas movies seek to answer that question (especially on the Hallmark movie channel!). So, what do you think the message is? Could Christmas have one overriding message for all of us?

The events surrounding our Christmas in the ICU became an example of how important family and close friends are in this life. Genuine relationships based on mutual love, respect, openness, and care are the richest of earthly "gifts" – gifts that keep on giving. While wrapped presents were given and received that year, the greatest gifts were having each other near.

Sadly, a few of our extended family have consistently opposed my wife and me because of our faith and conservative values. Their expressions of concern for our son were tainted by their closed and judgmental hearts towards us. Relationships do matter. Broken or wounded relationships hurt, while healthy ones can be healing. People need others to love, and those who genuinely love them – be they many or few – this Christmas and all throughout the year. And I believe the message of Christmas is about much more than our human relationships.

This season is called "Christmas" because it is about the coming of the "Christ" (Greek, or the "Messiah" in Hebrew), as God had promised through the Old Testament prophets. The promised "deliverer" has come, born to a virgin woman named Mary and her husband Joseph in a stable (most likely a cave used as a stable) in Bethlehem. An angel appeared and told Joseph in a dream to name him "Jesus" (meaning Savior) because he will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21)

Why do we need to be "saved from our sins"?

God created Adam and Eve so they and their descendants (us) could have a personal and loving relationship with God for eternity. He gave them one simple command, that they were not

to eat from the tree of “knowledge of good and evil” or they would surely die (Genesis 2:16-17). They rejected God’s command not to eat the uniquely empowered fruit from one tree and instead put their faith in the lies of the serpent (Satan) who said their eyes would be opened, and they would be like God. Eve was lured by the serpent to eat the fruit and gave some to her husband, and he ate it as well. By their actions, sin and death entered into the world, and humankind’s nature became corrupt. God’s intended relationship with humanity was broken. Thankfully, that is not the end of the story.

Through Moses, God established a system of animal sacrifice and other offerings for the Israelites by which the people could have some measure of relationship with Him. The central element of this system was the shedding of the blood of a lamb, ram, goat, or bull to atone for the sins of those making the offering. Moreover, throughout the Old Testament times, we see God calling people to repentance and to a relationship of faith in Him. This Old Testament sacrificial system was only temporary, and many Old Testament scriptures prophesied the coming Messiah (a Savior to the world), as the one who would become “the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Jesus became that Lamb for us because **“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him, shall not perish, but have eternal life” John 3:16.** Christ died on the cross, shedding his blood once and for all – so that all of us can have our sins forgiven, and our relationship with God restored, and the assurance of eternal life through Christ with Him in heaven when we die.

In the New Testament of the bible, the Apostle Paul says it well when writing to the believers in Corinth: **2 Cor. 5:19 “that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”**

God the Father sees all of our sinful ways, attitudes, rebellion, and more. However, our sinful ways and attitudes could not keep our loving Father from making the way for you and me to be forgiven and reconciled to Him (through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross). And now, God is making His appeal through us in **2 Cor. 5:20 “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”**

The joy of our 2018 Christmas had nothing to do with gifts or lavish meals, but with our treasured relationships. The message of Christmas in a single word is “Relationship” -- a restored and lasting relationship with God that begins with forgiveness of your past sins through your repentance and faith in Christ – never being separated from Him again (Rom 8:31-39). This Christmas, if you have not already made your relationship right with your Heavenly Father, now is a good time to be reconciled to God. He’s already paid the penalty for our sins and made a way for you through faith in Christ to restore your relationship with God, so that your future in heaven is secure.

If you have any questions about how to put your faith in Christ and begin (or restore) your relationship with God, contact us at askthepastor@loonlaketimes.com.