

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 23, 2015

THE TREE STAND

Matthew 7:24

At our house the most challenging part of putting up a Christmas tree is getting it to stand straight. We pick out the best, the fattest, the fullest tree and that takes a least three Christmas tree lots. The base of the tree is straightened even before we put it in the truck to come home. But once it is home, that is when the hard part starts. While one person holds the tree, the other person is putting on the stand. This year we had to cut some of the lowest branches off so the tree trunk would go all the way to the bottom of the stand. Virginia is always telling me how the tree won't look right if we cut off these branches. But if we want the tree to stand, these branches have to go. The trunk of the tree must be firmly against the bottom of the stand or it will fall. Every year I think we need a wider stand and a stronger and heavier base to hold up the large branches of the tree. It doesn't seem logical that 6 screws on a piece of plastic will be enough support to hold up an 8 foot tree. But somehow it does. If the base of the trunk is settled firmly down into the stand and if we do all we can to hold the tree straight and the screws are tight, the tree stands. Our life is like this tree in many ways. If we are not standing on the Word of God, if our life is not firmly planted on the life of Christ, we can't stand. Our lives must be secure on God's Word and the life of Christ for us to have a secure and firm foundation. - Dr. Tim Thompson, Senior Pastor

THURSDAY DECEMBER 24, 2015

FALLEN CHRISTMAS TREES

Matthew 11:28

Dorothy called last week. Her phone call was preceded by a text message with a photo of her living room in total disarray with diapers and clothes and empty baby bottles, and off to the right of the photo you could see two screaming babies. In the center of the picture was the Christmas tree. All the lights on the tree, but instead of being in the vertical position, it is on the floor. The photo came only seconds before pitiful-sounding Dorothy called sobbing, "My babies are crying, I am crying, and my tree fell down." I don't know if any of you remember, maybe you are experiencing this right now or will soon, but daily living is sometimes too much. We pile one more thing on top of daily living, and then one more thing. And soon our tree falls over, and we do, too. Work demands so much- children, marriage, bills, and we get tired and stressed out. There is never any time left over for you to take care of your needs. And in December we add to the daily stresses of everyday life the expense and time to takes to get ready for Christmas. Before we know it our tree falls over, and we find ourselves sobbing. We talk about trials and tribulations and how Christ overcame disease and sin and death, but we don't talk much about how to get through the daily, everyday, over and over of everyday living. Jesus' solution to the person fighting cancer is the same solution He gives to the one struggling through daily living, "Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." - Dr. Tim Thompson, Senior Pastor

FRIDAY DECEMBER 25, 2015

THE MISSING PAGE

Luke 2

Last Sunday when I stood up to preach on the Christmas story in Luke, I discovered that in the Bible I usually use the page that tells the story of the birth of Jesus was missing. I suppose that it had been read so often it came loose and fell out. It got me to thinking how sad it would be if we lost that page for good. Don't let the page about Jesus go missing this Christmas. I hope that today you will take a moment and you will read the Christmas story first to yourself and then out loud at all of your Christmas celebrations with family and friends today. The page that was missing from my Bible from Luke 2 says, "And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. And the angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified. But the angel said, 'Do not be afraid, I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.' Suddenly a great company of the heavenly hosts appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests.'" - Dr. Tim Thompson, Senior Pastor

SATURDAY DECEMBER 26, 2015

EVERYDAY JOY

Philippians 4:4 "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice."

This Christmas season I have noticed how much emphasis we place upon "Joy." So many of the songs we sing speak of the joy we have in recognizing Jesus' coming to us as a baby. "Joy to the World" is one the most beloved hymns of the season. Others like "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," "O Come, All Ye Faithful," and "Angels We Have Heard on High" also speak of the joy found in Jesus' birth. Clearly knowing Jesus should bring us joy, not just during the Christmas season but throughout the year. So as the season winds down we must remember to remain in a spirit of joy. David wrote in Psalm 16:11, "You will fill me with joy in your presence," so each day remember that having the privilege of coming into God's presence should produce joy in your heart. What might that joy look like? It reminds me of a time when my granddaughter was competing in a swim meet, and Charlie and I were late arriving but got there just as she was about to swim. We hurried down to the end of her swimming lane to greet her when she finished. When she was about two-thirds done she looked up and saw me. In her excitement, she stopped swimming and screamed, "Gramma!" Needless to say, she did not win the race, but everybody in the place knew that there was joy in her heart when she saw me waiting at the finish. I was thrilled at her reaction and believe God is greatly pleased when we come to Him with joy in our hearts. Ask God to give you His joy today and everyday as you spend time with Him. - Jan Niel, Prayer Ministry Director

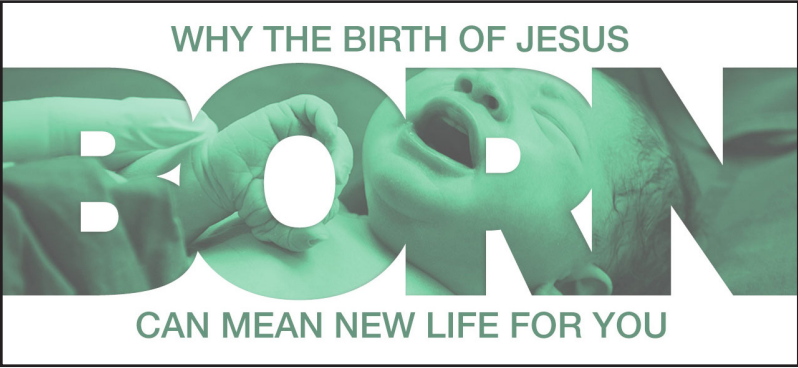
CONTEMPORARY SERVICE

WESLEY HALL - DECEMBER 20, 2015

WORSHIP GUIDE & DAILY DEVOTIONS

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SET LIST

- “Angels We Have Heard on High” arranged by Chris Tomlin
“The First Noel” arranged by Jerrod Dorminey
“Great Are You Lord” by All Sons & Daughters
“Love Came Down” by Kari Jobe
“One Thing Remains” by Bethel Worship

SERMON NOTES

LOVE IS BORN

Matthew 1:18-24 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife (NRSV)

1 John 4:19 We love because he first loved us. (NRSV)

SERMON NOTES CONTINUED

Consider:

Joseph stayed with Mary.
Matthew 1:18-24

God stayed with us.
1 John 4:19

Apply:

- Love is a decision.
1. A decision to _____
Philippians 2:7
 2. A decision to _____
John 15:13
 3. A decision for _____
2 Timothy 1:9

Respond:

Who do you need to love?

— Dr. Patrick M. Quinn

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MONDAY

DECEMBER 21, 2015

ADVENT AND THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

John 1:14 “So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness.”

This past year in our country has been difficult to say the least. The turmoil, suffering, and racial division have been heart-wrenching. These moments have been a fresh reminder why the advent of Christ was so necessary. Our society teaches us to avoid suffering at all costs and to seek our own happiness even if it requires being indifferent to the pain of others. This is why Advent has been replaced by holiday parties and shopping. Don’t get me wrong; I like cheesy Christmas songs and exchanging gifts as much as anyone. I am not a scrooge. However, sometimes the holidays can cause us to forget the true essence of Advent. Advent reminds us that the gospel is very different than our cultural values. Advent is the season when we remember that Jesus put on flesh and dwelt among us. Christ’s being born in a manger reveals a God who does not avoid our suffering and messiness but enters into it. Jesus knew suffering from the moment He entered the world. He was born into poverty as a refugee fleeing from genocide. He wept for us and with us. Eventually He was tortured and executed by the very people He came to save. Advent is not simply a sweet story about a baby born in a manger. Christ came to a world filled with darkness. He came as a light for the world. So during this season of Advent, let us seek ways to be light in a dark world. Let us seek to be instruments of peace and healing. Yes, the world is still dark. Suffering, pain, and injustice are still very real. But the darkness will not win. Christ has come...and He will come again.
- Rev. Brandon Dasinger/Teaching/Missions Pastor

TUESDAY

DECEMBER 22, 2015

THE QUESTION OF ADVENT

Romans 8:38-39 “And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can’t, and life can’t. The angels can’t, and the demons can’t. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can’t keep God’s love away. Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The question which the season of Advent puts to us is simply this: Who shall separate you from the love of Christ? What are you afraid of? Are you afraid that your weakness could separate you from the love of Christ? It can’t. Are you afraid that your sin or past mistakes could separate you from the love of Christ? They can’t. A broken family, difficult relationships, loneliness, and anxiety over the future? They can’t. Low self-esteem and rejection by others? They can’t. Your insecurities and fears? They can’t. The season of Advent reminds us that Christ would leave His throne in heaven before He would leave us in sin. Advent reminds us that He would give up His rights and privileges before He would give up on humanity. Advent reminds us that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord. Everything else will pass away, but the love of Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Nothing you do or do not do can change His love for you. He is Emmanuel... God with us.
- Rev. Brandon Dasinger/Teaching/Missions Pastor