

ADVENT #1: Luke 2:8-20
GOD'S CHRISTMAS LIST

Advent is the beginning of the new church year so our NEW YEAR starts today; During Advent we celebrate coming of Jesus –in the past , his work in the present and return in the future.

Many of the Christmas wishes we hear and the themes of songs reflect what the Bible teaches about the past, present and future work of Christ. in biblical terms this is the concept of Shalom – a deep sense of well-being, that all is right with the world.

EX: One Michael Bubl  song is an example of that longing expressed, even in a secular way. While the song “My grown up Christmas list” isn’t a Christian song per se it expresses a biblical longing – a longing for SHALOM.

No more lives, torn apart
That wars would never start
and time would heal all hearts
Every-man would have a friend
That right would always win
And love would never end
This is my grown up, Christmas list

Such a longing would be absurd for the consistent secular naturalist i.e. one who believes that we’re here as a result of a cosmic accident or are the result of random chance. In a world with no god and thus no purpose, no truth, no right or wrong it would be inconsistent and silly to wish for those things. To whom are you expressing that wish? How do you know what is “right”? What is “love” except a response to some neurological stimulus?

Listen to most secular songs and they’ll express a desire for love or some sort of world that has no basis in a purely secular framework. Without admitting it, the singers and song writers are borrowing from a Biblical framework for their songs.

But as Christians we do have a hope for these things BECAUSE of the past, present, and future coming and work of Christ.

We live now in a time of struggle, yet we long for Shalom – well being

EX: the Christmas program coming up is about Grace, Hope, and Peace because we do have a King who saves us, and He will ultimately make all things right.

There is a now and not yet reality to the Christian life. In a real sense all is not well in the world, but in a larger sense “all is well” because of the work and promises of God in Christ.

The now and not yet converge in Jesus, the Messiah and now we await the return of Christ and the consummation of the ages.

The prophet Isaiah, among others, spoke of “the coming days.” What they didn’t know is that those days began with the birth of Christ - the clock started ticking. We live in the “latter days” but don’t when the final end will be. The redemptive work of Christ has begun; we aren’t waiting for some future time for the restoration to begin. Jesus is at work NOW, even in the midst of the mess we see around us.

The Grown up Christmas wish list expresses longings that are absurd for a world without god, but those longings are fulfilled by god through Christ. A reading of the book of Isaiah shows how these things are promised in Christ.

Is 2:4; 9:6-7 ; 11:1-5; 25:6-8 ; 40:10-11,

Is 2

4And He will judge between the nations,
And will render decisions for many peoples;
And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
And never again will they learn war.

Isaiah 9

6For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
7There will be no end to the increase of *His* government or of peace,

Isa 11

1Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse,
And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.
2The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him,
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The spirit of counsel and strength,
The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

Isa 25

6 The Lord of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain;
A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow,
And refined, aged wine.
8 He will swallow up death for all time,
And the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces,
And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth;
For the Lord has spoken.

(Isaiah 40, v.11);

“He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: and he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

- these are prophetic pictures of Shalom - these passages help give us reference for God's Christmas List, and He will deliver.

It's possible that you won't give or get everything on your Christmas list, but God will not fail. All of His promises are "yes" in Christ. We do get a foretaste of them now, but they remain a part of the NOT YET.

So how do we live NOW, while we wait?

In a message several years ago, I spoke on the present value of the cross and introduced us to the 5 E's of our philosophy of ministry:

They are listed as Our Values we use in the New Member material. I also go back to them as we do a ReFocus on our vision and values. HONESTLY, I DON'T BRING THEM UP ENOUGH.... My bad.

Did you know that they are all found in the Messianic prophecies and Christmas story? LET'S REVIEW THEM

Exalt

Embrace

Equip
Encourage
Express

The Christmas narratives show us how the coming of Christ is at the heart of our Ministry values – the 5 E's; and they show us how we are to live as NOW as we await the NOT YET. QUICKLY, here they are in the Christmas narrative and what they might look like in our lives today.

After hearing the glorious announcement from the angels (**Exalt** Luke 2:14-20) the shepherds and the wise men go to see and worship the New Born King (**Embrace** Matthew 2:1-3).

There is exaltation on the part of the angels and the shepherds as they go to seek the one who has been born. The report of the shepherds created wonder in the hearts of all those who heard.

EXALT – A Heart Response of Faith Toward God That Celebrates His Glory

Luke 2:13 And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

Exaltation and worship are the natural responses to knowing Jesus just as exaltation is the result of those who stand before a beautiful sunrise or sunset at the beach. When you see it, you say, “Wow” Such a response enhances your joy and appreciation.

Do you see Jesus and his work? If so, the biblical norm is that you would be a person of praise. What does it look like

Exaltation is a part of your life. Is there a Hallelujah factor in your life i.e you regularly practice personal and corporate worship

- I engage my head and my heart in regular personal and corporate worship
- I have a personal life characterized by a practice of the presence of God - gratitude, peace, contentment, and the pursuit of holiness.

<https://web.ics.purdue.edu/~drkelly/DFWKenyonAddress2005.pdf> David Foster Wallace- This is Water.

“Because here's something else that's weird but true: in the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship –

If we worship anything but the true unchanging God, it will eat you alive.

If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you. On one level, we all know this stuff already.

If you Worship power, you will end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to numb you to your own fear. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. **But the insidious thing about these forms of worship is not that they're evil or sinful, it's that they're unconscious. They are default settings.”**

Advent is a time to reset the DEFAULT SETTINGS OF OUR HEARTS.

They're the kinds of worship you just gradually slip into, day after day, getting more and more selective about what you see and how you measure value without ever being fully aware that that's what you're doing.

EMBRACE – A Heart That Trusts And Treasures Christ (Luke 2:15ff)

Luke 2:15 When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds *began* saying to one

another, “Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.” 16 So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. ... 20 The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

This is the ongoing condition of the heart which enables us to express a Christ like walk of faith.

- I realize that I have a continual need for a heart posture of repentance and faith. I know Jesus as a friend of sinners, and I run to him for forgiveness and power.

Jesus did not come “out of the blue”; he was the Long Expected Messiah. Zacharias, Elizabeth, Mary, and Joseph had been **Equipped** and **Encouraged** by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:13, 67; Luke 1:41), the scriptures and angels (Luke 1:11, 26-38) to walk by faith as they played a part in welcoming the promised Savior.

Re: John the Baptist Lk 1:17 It is he who will go as a *forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

To Mary re: Jesus Luke 1:31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.”

Those around Jesus had been equipped and prepared through the teaching of the Holy Spirit through the prophets and angels.

Those like Simeon and Anna (Luke 2) were devout and were waiting for the consolation of Israel and they were encouraging others with the biblical hope.

What do equipping and encouraging look like for us?

EQUIP – Experiencing personal gospel driven transformation for cultural renewal and global mission

- I regularly preach the gospel to myself which leads to an ongoing walk of faith and repentance.
- I enjoy a regular practice of scripture reading/memorization and private prayer
- There is evidence that the fruit of the Holy Spirit is growing in my life
- I am intentional about my own spiritual growth and about ongoing opportunities that enable me to take other people from unbelief to belief and from belief to a maturing walk.

ENCOURAGE – Loving Others And Helping Them Be A Part Of The Body Of Christ

- I am growing in my faithfulness to what the Bible teaches about family relationships with my spouse, children, parents, co-workers, and CHURCH
- I am investing my time, talent, and treasure in a way that honors God and His eternal values

You might be surprised how much simple acts of love, caring, faithfulness, and service will ENCOURAGE others.

EXPRESS – To Communicate The Reality Of Christ Through Word And Deed

The shepherds and the wise men went to worship the Christ child, and the scripture tells us that the “shepherds went away praising and glorifying God for all that they had heard and seen.” We can certainly imagine that they and the wise men went away and told others about the amazing things that had happened to them (**Expressing**). Another great example of this is Anna (Luke 2:36-38); after seeing Jesus she “continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.”

When you’ve seen the Grand Canyon, you tell others about it; it’s natural to do so. You become an evangelist for the Grand Canyon.

How much more when we've been rescued from our own Grand Canyon of sin. It is natural to tell others about the great work of Christ.

What does a heart and lifestyle of EXPRESSING look like?

- I know my spiritual gifts and am engaged in ministry that utilizes them.
- I see my neighborhood and workplace as my mission field and am praying for specific people to come to faith.
- I seek to be intentional about being a witness for Christ in word and I am more involved with loving and serving the needs of others.

How about you? Do your Christmas preparations give you a 5-E focus, or are you heading into Christmas feeling F-I-N-E – Frustrated, Irritable, Neurotic, and Exhausted?

Remember to look past the baby in the manger and see the savior who came to live the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died.

The good news of Christmas is that God is with us and that He is for us.

Mary, Joseph, Simeon, and Anna didn't know how the story would be played out, yet they rejoiced and were changed by the coming of Christ.

We who live on this side of the death and resurrection of Christ have all the more reason for rejoicing each day; and we have greater resources for transformation.

Let the joy of Christmas give you a 5 E focus in your life.

Exalting the Father

Embrace the Son

Equipped by the Holy Spirit

Encouraging His followers

Expressing the Good News of the Gospel of the kingdom

The ABC's of coming to faith –

A - Admit that you're weak and need forgiveness, grace, and strength – That means there is GOOD NEWS FOR YOU

B- Believe that Jesus is the only savior who can heal your heart.

C- confess to God that you want to trust Jesus as your savior and Lord.

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Discussion questions

What are the 5 Es

Which would you say is the strongest in your own practice and why

Which would you say is the weakest and why?

How does the Joy of Christmas enrich each of those areas?

What can you do to enrich each of those practices in your life?