

Good News



Community Presbyterian Church

December, 2009

From the Pastor

How will we celebrate Christmas in the two-thousand-ninth year after the birth of Jesus of Nazareth?

The world is a very different place than the one into which Jesus was born. It's even a very different world than the one into which I was born. How can our celebrations connect us with Jesus and with his birth?

One way we try to keep the holidays holy is summed up in the slogan: Keep the Christ in Christmas! We say, "Merry Christmas," instead of "Happy Holidays." We write "Christmas" instead of "Xmas." We send Christmas cards with Bible verses and for postage use the madonna stamps. We tell the story of Jesus' birth and include an allusion to Jesus' death and resurrection.

These are well-intentioned and generally helpful; I've done them all. But they tend to focus on the words we say and not so much on the things we do. At its heart Christmas is not about words, no matter how good or true. It is about the Word becoming flesh. (John 1:18) To keep our celebration of Christmas true to the event of Jesus' birth we will need to focus on the things we do and the rituals we use.

Another way we try to keep our celebrations true is to focus on the gifts we give. Again this year I received a Heifer Project catalog. It says,

Take part in a growing holiday tradition by giving gifts that help those in need. Here's how: Instead of sending material gifts, to your friends and family, present them with this beautifully designed gift card letting them know that, in their names, you've given the gift of self reliance to a struggling family.

Giving to Heifer Project is good. Finding ways to honor those we love at Christmas without giving them needless, unwanted material gifts is helpful. I have given gifts like this at Christmas and I have received them. But neither the giving nor the receiving has done much to stir my mind or warm my heart toward Jesus and his birth.

Of course, we have a lot of traditions which warm our hearts and inspire good will toward all people, decorating and gift giving and meals together. I wouldn't want to lose these or make light of any of them. But I find very little in our celebrations which connects me directly and deeply with the miracle of that first Christmas.

One ritual that consistently works is the Christmas Eve candlelight service, particularly the passing of the flame from candle to candle and seeing that light in the eyes of those around the circle. Another is taking the time to watch very young children on Christmas morning (too young to get into Santa Clause—this will probably be the last year for our grandson, Emilio, age 2). And the last few years I have been blessed by putting together the Advent devotionals.

This year I am looking for some a new ritual, or a redoing of an old ritual, to help me and those around me to connect in a meaningful way with the coming of our Savior, the incarnation of God in the son of Mary, the birth of one very specific and unique Jesus of Nazareth. I know I'll have to slow down and find some peace to do this, and that won't be easy with all the Christmas obligations. But I'll try, and I hope you will too.

Let me know what you, personally, have found helpful for connecting with Jesus at Christmas.

Pastor Mark



Christmas DINNER

Saturday, December 12
5:00 PM

We'll begin with dinner. The church will supply barbecued tri-tip. Bring a side dish to share. If you would like to host a table, please sign up in the social hall or call Valerie Arnold (854-9971).

After dinner we will enjoy a brief Christmas program.

Birthdays

- 5 Kathy Conrad
- 12 Ruth Williams
- 18 Emilio Hollingsworth
- 27 John Schlak

Anniversaries

- 23 Maudie and Dave Todd



Please pick up and use our Advent devotionals, "Come Lord Jesus!." You can also find the devotional online at cpc-advent.blogspot.com. Online you can also add your comments. Please do.

Candlelight Worship Service



Christmas Eve
Thursday, December 24
7:00 PM



The Brown Bag Ladies are collecting Christmas gifts for local children. If you are interested in helping with this project please call Nancy Hollingsworth (854-1910) or Kathy Mendonça (854-2558)



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

Luke 2:16-19

For years now I’ve had a short quote displayed in my kitchen, cut from an unremembered magazine: “Motherhood does not give us the right to speak without thinking, but only the right to think without speaking.” Good advice but difficult to do!

Can we even imagine being Baby Jesus’ parent—mother or father?

The miracle of the virgin birth begins in poverty with all its underclass choices.

After Jesus was born in the equivalent of a garage in an alley, his first visitors were shepherds straight from the fields—bringing sheep aroma along on their clothing, no doubt. (*I’d advise these guys to turn away! No self-respecting Maternity nurse would allow them within a hundred yards of a mom & newborn baby!*)

Only poor people in those days chose doves or pigeons as a sacrifice at the Temple. Mary & Joseph did just that when dedicating their son. (*Surely I would find a way to borrow money from a friend, or use credit to buy an expensive sacrifice. If I had a baby boy to celebrate, I’d do it properly!)*

An old man and an old woman both spoke aloud concerning Jesus’ future at that visit to the Temple. (*I wonder how sane I would consider them to be if I heard two elderly people say similar words in our church.*)

In Calvin Miller’s allegory of Jesus’ life, *The Singer*, Jesus tells his mother that he must leave their home and begin his ministry. Mary says: “I know. I heard the Ancient Star—Song only once. It was the very night you were born. And all these years I’ve known you would board the (carpentry) shop someday.” (*I would want to ask Jesus not to leave me, to stay safe at home and be there to help me as I grow old. Maybe I would even use the guilt/obligation card to convince him to change his mind in order to prolong his life. I don’t want him to die!!!*)

We can only imagine their conversation and emotions. But for sure this is a real story. We also know the happy ending of His resurrection! I am amazed and humbled all over again tonight as I read Luke once more and write this article. Praise God for the faith in action, the obedience and the incredible unselfishness of Mary and Joseph and Jesus.

Father God, please help us to celebrate Christmas this year with small acts of bravery dedicated to you, day by day. Help us to recognize and follow your voice and trust you for the outcome.

Happy Birthday, Jesus. We love you!

(Merry Christmas-Nancy)

COMMUNITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

399 Sixth Street
Gustine, CA 95322
Return Service Requested

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 12
Gustine, CA 95322

Sunday School, 9:00 AM — Worship, 10:30 AM

Pastor — Mark Hollingsworth

Treasurer — Dorothy Gray; Choir Director — Jim Conrad

Secretary — Med Hoover; Parish Nurse — Nancy Hollingsworth

Office Hours — 9:00-Noon, Wednesday, Thursday and by appointment

Telephone: (209) 854-6772; email: cpc-gustine@earthlink.net

Web Site: www.wefollowjesusingustine.org



Church Decorating Party

Friday, December 4

6:00 PM

We will begin with a light supper
and then work together to trim the tree
and decorate the sanctuary.