

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Monday, December 25th, 2023
Rev. Gerry Gallant

What is Christmas all about?
Christmas Day
Luke 2:8-14

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

God is here! The Messiah has come!

**We open our eyes to see him and lift our hearts to worship him.
We have come to exalt the name of Jesus, our Savior and King,
and to bring glory to God the Father.**

In our worship we demonstrate the mind of Christ
in declaring to God that he is the supreme authority in our lives.

**We bow before him in submission to our Lord and King.
Come, worship the Lord!**

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

O Immanuel,
O Wisdom from on high,
O Lord of might,
O Branch of Jesse's stem,
O Key of David,
O Bright and Morning Star,
O King of nations,
We rejoice and are glad
on this bright Christmas morning,
for truly you have come,
full of grace and truth.
Even now, come into our hearts again.
Show us the path of knowledge.
Comfort us in our mourning.
Save us from our sin.
Open wide our way to heaven.
Turn our darkness into light.
End our sad divisions
and be our King of peace,

so that every creature in heaven and on earth
will join in a chorus of praise,
and shout with joy to you, our Lord. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn: “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

Call to Confession

Today we celebrate that Jesus, our Lord,
came to earth as a human, just like us but without sin.
He came so that we who sin may be freed from sin.
With the peace that comes from knowing Jesus came,
let us confess our sins and be forgiven.

Prayer of Confession

**God of grace and truth,
in Jesus Christ you came among us
as light shining in darkness.
We confess that we have not welcomed the light,
or trusted good news to be good.
We have closed our eyes to glory in our midst,
expecting little, and hoping for less.
Forgive our doubt, and renew our hope,
so that we may receive the fullness of your grace,
and live in the truth of Christ the Lord.**

Assurance of Pardon

I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.
Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you;
he is the Messiah, the Lord

The Lord’s Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,
Forever and ever. Amen.**

Responsive Reading**Titus 3:3-7**

³ For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others, and hating one another.

⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Children's Hymn: "Joy to the World"**Prayer for illumination****(Congregant Prepared)****Scripture****Luke 2:8-14**

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was 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 those with whom he is pleased!"

Sermon

'What is Christmas all about?'

It seems like such a simple question, yet there are so many different answers to this question in our culture and even within the church.

Just over 50 years ago, Charles Schultz set out to answer this question. You might recognize the name; Charles Schultz was the creator of the peanuts comic strip, and in 1965, he was approached by Coca Cola and CBS to create a Christmas special featuring the characters from his extremely popular comic strip for television.

However, the sponsors did not get the lighthearted animated Christmas special filled with canned laugh tracks that they were anticipating. Instead, they were presented with a melancholy tale, featuring a jazz soundtrack.

When he was confronted by the sponsors about his vision of the show, he responded by saying that 'The network should let the people at home enjoy the show at their own speed, in their own way.' Then he walked out of the meeting.

Schultz insisted that no laugh track was to be used, and to make matters worse he also demanded that children be used to voice all of the character, because he wanted to preserve the innocence of their characters. This led to a few issues as a few of the children were too young to read and had to have their lines fed to them one at a time and at times almost word by word.

The sponsors wanted to can the production and never let it see the light of day, they hoped that after a single viewing, the response would be so bad, that they could lock it away in the vaults and never see it again. Yet, that is not what happened, instead it became a staple of the holiday season, showing on many of the networks each Christmas and is still popular today on streaming platforms whenever it appears.

And the entire show comes down to a single question that is asked by Charlie Brown, 'Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?'

Charlie Brown seeks out all of the other characters and tries to discover the true meaning of Christmas through each of them.

He starts with his best friend Snoopy.

For Snoopy Christmas is all about Christmas, he loves it, he is a big fan of Christmas lights and Christmas music and feelings. Snoopy loves the idea of what Christmas is, but he doesn't really know what it is all about.

Yes, he loves the excitement of Christmas, he loves the pretty decorations and the way that all of the places around town take part in Christmas. He loves the parades and the tree lightings; he loves the carolers that show up singing.

We all know people that are like Snoopy, Halloween ends, and Christmas begins the next day. There are people in this world that are so obsessed with the Christmas season that you could ask them how far away Christmas is in the middle of summer, and they could tell you the number of days, hours, and minutes.

Christmas has been shifted from a Holy day into a Holiday by the world.

Christmas is about the days off work, family, and food. Yes, these are things that we all enjoy about Christmas, but these are not what Christmas is all about.

We can have those same things in many other seasons, Canada Day and Thanksgiving are also usually all about the holiday, family, and food, and they are very different from Christmas. The problem is that it is very easy to get caught up in this secular view of the holiday, because this is how much of the world celebrates Christmas, a holiday where you get to spend time with family and friends while enjoying foods that are not the best for our belt size, without knowing the Holy reason for the celebration.

Not finding the answer to what Christmas is all about with Snoopy, Charlie Brown goes to visit Lucy in her counselling station. He tells her that he does not understand Christmas and while everyone else is feeling happiness, he is feeling sad.

Lucy believes she has the answer she tells Charlie Brown that he needs to get involved in some real Christmas projects and then he will find his Christmas cheer. She then recruits him to direct the Christmas play. For Lucy that is what Christmas is all about, it is all about the things you do during the Christmas season.

This is another view of Christmas that many people in the world hold too. They are busy buying gifts and writing cards. They are thinking about the meals that need to be cooked, the cookies that need to be baked and the toys that need to be put together. They are worried about all of the parties they need to attend, and they cannot forget about getting dressed up so that they can make their yearly appearance at church on Christmas Eve.

Lucy is busy, but not in the same way that Snoopy is busy. Snoopy is caught up in the cheer of the season and he is laughing and dancing and enjoying Christmas, without a worry in the world.

Lucy is feeling the hustle and bustle of the season weighing down on her shoulders. She is getting overwhelmed by the business of the season and the keeping up of appearances in her life. Finally, when she is overwhelmed by the stress she tells Charlie Brown, 'Look, Charlie, let's face it. We all know that Christmas is a big commercial racket. It's run by a big eastern syndicate, you know.'

A sociologist summed up the difference between Lucy and Snoopy nicely when he said, 'There are some people who want to throw their arms round you simply because it is Christmas; there are other people who want to strangle you simply because it is Christmas.'

For many people Christmas becomes an endless list of obligations and stress. We have enough trouble and stress in our lives without adding Christmas to that list, so Christmas is definitely not all about what we do in the season.

Jesus Christ did not come to this world just to give us more things to do, he came to bring us Eternal Life.

Still frustrated with being unable to find an answer to his question, Charlie Brown returns home to his little sister Sally. The little girl that read the lines for Sally was so young, she had to be fed the lines word by word. For Sally Christmas is all about what most of the world is about for children at that age, themselves.

Sally just wants one thing. She wants her big brother to help her write her letter to Santa, and when he refuses and tries to brush it off, she forces the paper and pencil on him.

She writes her list and then she finishes her letter by telling Santa, 'If it seems too complicated, make it easy on yourself and just send money. How about tens and twenties?'

For many people this is what Christmas is all about, themselves and what is in it for them. Christmas is about them doing, saying, and getting the things that make them happy. They are the ones that try to dictate when the party will be, when the meal is served, what the meal will be. They will let you know far ahead of time exactly what they want from you, without caring if it is within your means or not.

These are the people who want what they want. Sally tells her brother, 'All I want is what I have coming to me. All I want is my fair share' and that is understandable coming from someone who is under the age of 5. However, that is the reality of many people well past the age of 5 in this world today. They are only concerned with what gifts they will receive, getting their fair share of the Christmas loot.

However, Jesus came to bring us the greatest gift, eternal life, not the things of this world. So, Christmas is not all about the things we receive, Christmas is not all about us.

For Charlie Brown Christmas is all about a feeling of sadness and despair. This is also true for many people around the world today. Christmas is usually a time of happiness, of reunion and family time, and for many people who have experienced loss, Christmas becomes a time of loneliness and despair.

Earlier in the tale Charlie Brown tells Linus, "I think there's something wrong with me Linus, Christmas is coming, but I'm not happy. I don't feel the way I'm supposed to feel. I just don't understand Christmas, I guess. I like getting presents and sending Christmas cards and decorating trees and all that, but I'm still not happy. I always end up feeling depressed.'

Christmas seems to amplify and focus the depression and loneliness that people have in their lives. For many people Christmas is a reminder of the people who are no longer in their lives, people who they are separated from by death, divorce, or distance and when everyone around them is celebrating their own families, that feeling of loss is emphasized.

For others stress and anxiety comes from the inability to live up to the expectations of the season by society. They work hard and struggle to make ends meet. Getting the perfect gift for a loved one, a parent or a child becomes a fiscal impossibility. If you have been paying attention to the Perth Facebook page you will have seen plenty of parents looking to get even secondhand things for their children this year, because purchasing new is outside of their means.

For many people being told to 'cheer up' or just get involved' does nothing to help them lose that sense of loneliness. And for many the constant reminder of how worse off they are is a painful experience.

Jesus Christ came to offer the world eternal life, not despair, depression, and loneliness.

Finally, we come to Linus. For Linus Christmas is all about Christmas. Yet it is in a very different way than Snoopy. Snoopy was all about the secular aspects of Christmas, Linus is all about the spiritual aspects of Christmas.

Linus is the one who knows the story of the first Christmas by heart. He steps up on stage and recites the story from memory, in the King James Version!

There are many Christians in the world who are like Linus, keeping Christ in Christmas. People who have bumper stickers that remind others that Jesus is the reason for the season. People who challenge the commercialization and secularization of Christmas. Sometimes they go to an extreme, demanding that the secular celebration of Christmas become more like the spiritual.

However, the problem is that for many of them when the tree and lights come down on January 1st, they pack up Christ along with Christmas. Yes, they demand Christ in Christmas, but they leave him there, content to have him as a baby in the manger and not as a powerful influence in their lives.

However, Linus's message does go one step further.

(VIDEO)

Throughout all of the cartoons that Schultz drew of the Peanuts gang, Linus is known for his security blanket. Throughout the story all of the other characters; Lucy, Snoopy, Sally and all of the others attempt over and over to separate Linus from that blue blanket he clutches to everywhere he goes. Even when his security blanket becomes a reason for the others to tease and ridicule him, he simply refuses to give it up.

That is until that single scene in the Christmas Special. While reciting the Christmas Story, Linus drops his security blanket.

The sponsors wanted this whole biblical scene removed from the special, yet Schultz insisted that it remain, and when we understand that this is the one-time Linus drops his Security blanket we begin to understand why.

He drops the blanket when he says, 'fear not'! Fear not. The truth is that Jesus Christ separates us from all of the fears, troubles, worries, anxiety, and stress we have in this world. Jesus frees us from our fears, from our sins. Jesus Frees us from the habits and sins that we are unable and perhaps even unwilling to break. The birth of Jesus Christ allowed God's people to drop the sense of false security that we get from the things of this world, the things that the world grasp to so securely, and instead lets us cling to the grace, mercy, and love of Christ instead.

After his speech, Linus turns to Charlie Brown and simply states, 'And that's what Christmas is all about Charlie Brown.'

Christmas is not about a single day, or even a season.

American President Calvin Coolidge said, 'Christmas is not a time or a season but a state of mind. To cherish peace and good will, to be plenteous in mercy, is to have the real spirit of Christmas.' Christmas should be something that Christians celebrate just as seriously in June as they so in December.

The Story of Christmas should influence how we live every day, noy just a few weeks in December, because when we celebrate the coming of Christ, we are celebrating something much bigger than just a baby being born in a manger 2000 years ago. We are celebrating the birth of the Saviour; we are celebrating the lives that are changed by his presence and the world that is changed by those who walk as his disciples.

Charles Dickens wrote, 'I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year.' Dickens understood that the truth, if the events of Christmas of not change the way you live, then you have missed understanding what Christmas is all about.

For far too many people Keeping Christ in Christmas is simply about the firstborn son of Mary, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger because there was no room for them anywhere else.

Yes, that is what happened factually. However, the book of Galatians reminds us that God sent his son, to be born of a woman and subject to the law at precisely the right time. Jesus was not just born at random; it was all part of God's divine plan, he was not just the son of Mary, he was the Son of God.

Jesus's birth was not just that of any other baby, he was God born in human likeness, the divine taking upon himself all of the limitations of humanity. He gave up his Godliness, all of his divine privileges and took on the humble position of a human being. He chose to come to us as a newborn infant.

The divine creator of all that exists, chose to take part in the full human experience. The trauma of birth, the pains of youth, the awkwardness of puberty, and the challenges of adult life. For thirty-three years he walked as a human being on this planet and experienced the life we all experience. He suffered and was tested, so that he could understand our suffering and testing. He lived a life of perfect obedience as an example of how we are called to live.

He brought us a simplified commandment. Love God first and love your neighbor as yourself.

Schultz snuck this simplified message into his Christmas special as well. When Charlie Brown goes to find a Christmas tree, he sees lots of trees, some are big and full, others are covered in bright lights and colorful decorations. Yet Charlie Brown did not choose any of those trees. Instead, he picks a pitiful little tree, with just a few sparse branches. The tree is literally the least of the possible trees that Charlie Brown could choose.

Linus reminds us of what God does when he looks at the tree that is considered pitiful by world standards, bent over with the weight of the world upon it. Linus wraps his security blanket around the base of that little tree saying.

‘Maybe it just needs a little love.’

And in that moment, the tree awakens, it stands tall and firm. A reminder that when God is with us, no matter who we are, no matter what mistakes we have made, no matter how the world views us, a little love can make all of the difference.

What is Christmas all about? It is all about God and the way that having him first in our lives changes the very core of our being not just at Christmas but every day of our lives. It is about how knowing how much God loves us, which allows us to go out and share that love and our time, talents, and treasures with others in this world who are in need of a little help and His presence in their lives. It is about us being secure in Christ, even when we face trouble, trials, and temptations, because 2000 years ago our Saviour was placed in swaddling clothes in a manger, and it was all part of God’s perfect plan.

Let us Pray,

Merciful God, loving Father,
 we give you thanks and praise
 that you have mercifully fulfilled
 the word of your promise to the patriarchs
 and sent your only Son
 to become truly human
 for our salvation and blessedness.

O Lord Jesus Christ,

eternal praise be to you,
 that you, being rich, for our sakes became poor,
 that we through your poverty might become rich;
 that you have become our brother,
 that we with you might become the children of God.
 Grant that you may be born in our hearts,
 just as you, though you are Lord of lords,
 have for our sakes become a child,
 so give us the right childlike mind.
 You are the brightness of the Father's glory
 and image of his person,
 renew us in your holy likeness.

Heavenly Light,
 lighten us through the darkness of this world.
 Eternal Life, give us life in you.
 Great Prince of Peace, grant us your peace,
 and keep us ever in your kingdom,
 that we may praise and magnify you in your glory:
 you, with the Father and the Holy Spirit live and reign forever.
Amen.

Source: Freely modified from The Swedish Rite: a translation of "Handbok för svenska kyrkan" by Eric Esskildsen Yelverton, 1921, Litany Prayer for Christmas Day, p. 52-53

Hymn: "See, Amid the Winter's Snow"

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3). We also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer:

E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. standrewsperthoffering@gmail.com If you have an Offering Envelope #, please include it in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (e.g., Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.

Offertory Prayer
(Congregant Prepared)

Closing Hymn: “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”

Pastoral Prayer

Almighty God, you have poured upon us
the new light of your incarnate Word:
Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts,
may shine forth in our lives,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Benediction

May God, who sent his angels
to proclaim the glad news of the Savior’s birth,
fill you with joy and make you heralds of the gospel. **Amen.**