

Christmas Eve Sermon *“The Same Mindset of Christ”*

Growing up in the 1960s, as I did, Christmas now feels like a distant past from the days of picking out Christmas gifts from a Sears catalog. Everyone has a sentimental spot for when they grew up. When I was a kid, Christmas was the best. The music was so memorable, not to leave out that the movies and TV shows were the greatest. In 1964, Charlie Brown Christmas first came upon the television scene, in black and white no less. Then there was the television animation of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer and Alvin and the Chipmunks or perhaps How the Grinch Stole Christmas. I remember going out to sing Christmas carols to shut-ins as part of the church youth group. Back then, the popular toys were Slinky, etch-a-sketch, a wind-up robot named Mr. Machine, silly putty, marbles, pick-up sticks, a transistor radio, and maybe a Lionel train set. But Christmas back then was not so much about receiving gifts but more about family gatherings. What a great decade to be a kid. But for me, who can argue that Christmas has lost the origin of its true meaning?

The world seems divided in their views of Christmas. Some want to give up on it and hand it over to internet shopping. Others want to salvage it and use it to say something important about the birth of Jesus to a weary secular world. I, for one, would like to take my place with John the Baptist as a witness to a bleak world concerning Christ’s light so that through him, all people might believe and follow his example.

I love to ask questions, and so, I ask of you, have we taken any time this season of Christmas to reflect on God loving us enough that he became flesh, born in a manger, only to later die on the cross? Have you really been stunned yet this year and thought about God sending his Son to earth in the form of a human baby? Have you had one of those moments and thought, “God, I can’t believe you have done that for me?” Or perhaps you are dreaming of another type of gift waiting under the tree?

Every year, it gets more challenging because it’s just another Christmas. It is another time for us to focus on the birth of Christ, and it is so easy to become distracted instead of quieting our hearts. I have to be honest in preparing for tonight’s message. I asked God and myself the question: Okay, God, what can I do or say that would honor you the most? Sure, we can sing some songs, reminisce about our childhood, tell the story of Jesus’ birth, and light some candles. But would that honor him most? What I concluded is that we, God’s people, would come ready to worship, still amazed at Jesus coming down to this earth and die for you and me. But if we were honest, we would say that most of this year has been so busy that we have not had time to still our hearts and be amazed.

If you have a pew bible in front of you, turn to Philippians 2:5-7, found on page 831, and follow along as I read. **“Have this in mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man.”** Here’s what we are going to do. Let’s take about ten seconds in a moment of silence, and as each

of us comes before God while reflecting on this passage, think back to the birth of Christ, say to him whatever you want to say, and worship him from the heart.

Father, I ask that your Holy Spirit speak to everyone in this room and that we all be amazed at what you did for us, Lord. I ask that you and your Word speak to everyone's heart and that we leave here amazed. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I have to be honest: It seems like Christmas snuck up on me this year for a variety of reasons. Yes, I've been planning all through Advent for tonight, but it's been tough to focus and be amazed by Jesus. This past week, I began seeking to tune the world out, but honestly, the distractions have not allowed me enough quiet time to focus and genuinely thank God. Then, with the grace of God, I became acquainted with the testimony of a young, blind teenage girl living in California. Her name is Alissa.

Blind from birth, Alissa says she does not get distracted by appearances of the world, such as the way things or people look. Her mother said that Alissa loves Christmas more than anyone in her family simply because she can't visibly see all the distractions that would keep her from Jesus. In her testimony, Alissa said, although I cannot see, I know "God is really awesome." He showed me a lot this particular Christmas season. I, too, get distracted. I really do.

But it is a different kind of distraction because you all see the world around you, and I do not. I get distracted because I want Christmas to be ideal, and sometimes, the sense of a perfect Christmas will get in the way. For instance, I want to hear a particular song. I want to do things of tradition. You know, Christmas can really be distracting. But you know what? God has shown me this particular season more than any other season in my life that it is not about me and what I want Christmas to be like. Honestly, **it's about His birthday**. If it were your birthday, you would like people to recognize the fact that you were born.

Jesus was born as a humble, innocent baby in a manger. I've never actually seen a manger or even imagined a picture where nasty animals hang out. I can only imagine it was not a pleasant experience smelling really bad, and there's no room, but yet Jesus came to this stable where the lowest of creatures are, born in this trough of hay to an innocent virgin girl, a sinner like you and me. God's love for us is so unreal. I think that is so cool, and God has given me a vision, a different vision, feeling like I was there kneeling before this manger worshipping this savior of the world.

I thought for a moment like I was Mary and that he had put me there with the wise men who had brought these gifts. I thought about these poor shepherds bowing before him, people who were given this most disgusting job, shepherds who listened to this angel saying "Come" to Bethlehem to see this baby, and they were so blessed. So, this Christmas, I feel different. I feel as if God wants us to come to see this divine baby in the way he came. Maybe we can really focus on that this Christmas." End quote.

On this Holiest of nights, shouldn't we want that type of **mindset of purity**? Shouldn't we want that type of moment where God gives us this experience with the shepherds or the wise men before God in the flesh? Would we know what to do if Jesus, the baby Jesus, were right here? Imagine if it were your job to take care of Jesus; think about how you would treat him. If we genuinely adore him, then that should be easy to do, right? But I want to take you back to what Jesus said when he washed the disciples' feet. He said, okay, now I want you to come and clean my feet. I have set an example for you, and now, in honor of me, I was hoping you could do this for one another. I'm not asking you to do this for me. Jesus says I am asking you to do this for one another.

A short time ago, I gave a sermon from a parable, the sheep and the goats, in Matthew 25. In a brief cliff-note summary, here's the point. Jesus says if you want to honor me, then whatever you do for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. It's easy to walk through these doors tonight and come to worship and adore Jesus, and yet what Jesus asks us to do is see him in these people next to us. When I began praying about tonight, I asked myself, "What would honor Jesus the most?" It's not for us to come and hear me give a formal explanatory sermon and attempt to come up with something new about the incarnation of Jesus Christ and have you all say, "Oh, I never thought about that before." That is what I have been trying to think through these past weeks. And so, Jesus would be honored if everyone here came to meet other people's needs with a mindset of purity.

And so, as I prepare to close, I leave you here tonight and ask you this question: what could you do to honor Jesus? What does Jesus most want? If we are really celebrating his birth, I want you to think about what God would like you to do. Here's God, the creator of the universe, who made himself nothing, into this little infant coming to earth in a feeding trough. Think through this Christmas season from the mindset of Jesus' perspective based on his word and how you would like to adore him. Share this Christmas with someone you love, and cherish the time you have together. Take time to reflect on the past, treasure the present, hope for the future, and give thanks to God for his indescribable gift. Amen.