

Fil-Am Community Church
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Why Does Christmas Give Us Hope?

Key Verse: (Isaiah 7:14), *“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”*

All people in the world are searching for hope. In a world that’s filled with violence and where personal problems, struggles, and pain sometimes seem bigger than the latest natural disaster, we wonder where we can find hope.

The Bible talks about the hope of Christmas. But is it really just a blooper? We all know what a blooper is, right? Let me give you a few examples that appeared in Church bulletins from different churches:

- “The cost for attending the Fasting and Prayer Conference includes meals.”
- “Morning sermon: Jesus walks on the water. Evening sermon: Searching for Jesus.”
- Scouts are saving aluminum cans, bottles and other items to be recycled. Proceeds will be used to cripple children.
- “Potluck supper at 5pm. Prayer and medication to follow.”
- “Ladies, don’t forget the rummage sale. It’s a chance to get rid of things not worth keeping around the house. Don’t forget your husbands.”

We laugh at those bloopers. But if we think that Christmas is a blooper, that’s not a laughing matter. Angels announced the birth of Jesus to shepherds by saying, “Peace on earth, goodwill toward men.” All the wrongs in the world are now supposed to be made right. Right? After all, we have

Immanuel—we have God with us. But it doesn't happen that way. In the last half of Matthew chapter 2 we discover that Herod, king of Judea, in a jealous rage, had all the male children in Bethlehem two years old and younger murdered. Jesus came to bring peace on earth. But babies were killed. And we want to ask, "Why?" The answer is found in an unsettling fact: there are some things that Christmas did not do.

Let me give you a couple of things

1. CHRISTMAS DID NOT ELIMINATE EVIL.

It is eye opening that a year or two after the birth of Jesus Christ we are confronted with the evil intentions of Herod. Magi from the East came to Israel looking for the Messiah. A new star had signaled His birth. In their searching they had stopped by Herod's palace in Jerusalem to get more information. When Herod heard from the Magi that the Messiah had been born, he determined to kill Him. He would not allow anyone to live who would have a claim on his throne.

Isn't that something? In the same chapter, Matthew chapter 2, we have the innocence of Jesus and the corruption of Herod. We have the salvation of God and the slaughter of innocent children. We have the purely good and the purely evil. Jesus' birth did not eliminate evil in the world.

The world is still full of evil because it is full of people. All of us are capable of evil. Someone wrote a sermon titled, “Our Brother Herod.” We don’t like to think of Herod, the one who murdered the babies, as our brother. But there is within each of us the same capacity for evil that was in Herod.

2. CHRISTMAS DID NOT ELIMINATE SUFFERING.

Can you imagine the suffering of those mothers and fathers whose children were murdered by jealous King Herod? Matthew includes a quote from Jeremiah to describe the pain of this whole incident: “*A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more*” (Matthew 2:18). Bible scholars agree that probably 20 or 30 babies died in Bethlehem that day. Twenty or thirty mothers had their precious babies taken from them. There was intense grief and suffering. Jesus had come into the world. It didn’t mean that all suffering would end.

Some of you have experienced suffering this holiday season. You’ve lost your job or about to lose it. You have dealt with unexpected illness.

You’re not in good terms with your spouse or children or certain people. You’re not the only ones.

Christmas did not eliminate suffering in the world. I guess, all in all, you could say that Christmas did not make the world a safer place.

But let's think about what Christmas did do. Christmas did give us hope. Even though evil and suffering continues to exist in this world, the Bible gives us God's promises that encourages us to look ahead with great hope. So, let me share with you why Christmas gives us hope.

The first reason is because

1. ONE DAY GOD WILL DO AWAY WITH EVIL.

Here is an important concept: although the birth of Jesus did not destroy evil, Jesus was born that all evil might be destroyed. It didn't happen on the day of His birth, and it still hasn't happened, but one day it will. 1 John 3:8 (HCSB) says, *"The one who commits sin is of the Devil, for the Devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose: to destroy the Devil's works."*

Jesus came to destroy evil—the work of the devil. And He is doing that today, one life at a time. As people find a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ their lives are changed and the work of the devil is destroyed. That's how Jesus is eliminating evil. He is eliminating it one life at a time. And thank God, there will come a time when He takes us home to be with Him to a place where evil is no more.

The second reason why Christmas gives us hope is because

2. ONE DAY GOD WILL DO AWAY WITH SUFFERING.

Christmas didn't eliminate suffering. But because Jesus was born, one day there will be no more suffering for those who call Him Lord.

Revelation 21:3-4 (NIV) tells us what eternity will be like for those who cling to Christ as Lord: *“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’”*

That means that when we look out at the world and see all the suffering in it, the appropriate question is not “Why?” but “When?” “When, Lord, will You bring to pass what You began in Jesus—the elimination of suffering for Your people?”

Isn't it good to know that after we have suffered in this life, we will go to a place where the bells are ringing, a place Jesus prepared for us where there will be no suffering or pain? You see, Christmas does give us hope. And that hope helps us to hold on.

God loves all of us. There was a time when the great question being asked by young adults seeking spiritual truth was “How can I know that God exists?” Today the question has changed. It is no longer the existence of God, but the presence of God. Which leads us to the third reason why Christmas gives us hope.

3. IT GIVES US HOPE THAT EVERYDAY GOD IS WITH US THROUGH SUFFERING AND PAIN

Many people today are wanting to feel the presence of God. They want to be assured that God is caring and loving because of the presence of evil and suffering in this world. Some, in fact, have turned away from God because they can't reconcile a good God with an evil world. Is God not interested in human beings?

Chuck Templeton was once a gifted evangelist, even better than Billy Graham. Both of them were involved with Youth for Christ International in the 1940's up to the 1950's. However, something happened that made them part ways.

One day, Chuck saw in the cover of Life Magazine a picture of an African woman holding her tiny, thin, and dying child in her arms in the midst of an arid land. He then wondered how a loving God would not let even a drop of rain to fall for that hapless child.

As a result, Chuck gave up his faith in 1957. He left preaching and dabbled in broadcasting and writing. Before he died of Alzheimer's in 2001, he said he would like to believe but he just could not believe in this personal God of the Bible who would allow a starving refugee woman to call out to God for rain when her baby was dying and there was no answer. Yet, in an interview with

a Christian writer later on, he confessed that he still longed for Jesus. Chuck Templeton may have left his faith, but his heart was still hungry for God.

I think a lot of us struggle with that kind of thing. We're in pain and we want to be comforted. You know where true comfort lies? It's in Jesus. He promises that he will never leave you nor forsake you. You see, another name for Jesus in the Bible is Immanuel. In the Old Testament, when Isaiah prophesied the coming of the Messiah, he said, *"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."* (Isaiah 7:14) Immanuel is Hebrew for "God with us." Literally, God became man to be with us. As Jesus, he lived, he taught, he did miracles, he suffered, he died, he rose and went to heaven. But he promised his disciples that even though he was in heaven he would always be with them. He says in Matthew, *"I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."*

Since Jesus is with you day after day, you can have the assurance that he will take care of all your troubles. In fact, you can cast all your troubles upon him. He says in Matthew 11, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*

Do you want rest for your troubled heart this season? Do you want peace for your anxious spirit? All you need to do is to look to Jesus and what he has done. Probably, the reason why you're feeling restless and worried is because you haven't committed your life to Jesus.

Committing your life to Jesus means believing that he is the only way to heaven. Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

Jesus is saying, “You cannot enter heaven by your religion, you cannot enter heaven by being good, you cannot enter heaven by giving gifts, doing good works, you cannot enter heaven through any other means or any other person except through me.”

And why? Because Jesus is the only person who carried the weight of your sins when he was nailed on the cross. In short, Jesus died for you. The Bible says that we are all sinners and condemned to die. It is sin that separates us from a holy God. The Bible says that his eyes are too pure to look on evil. And so, I cannot save you, you cannot save me. Only someone perfect can save you and me. That’s Jesus. The Bible says, *“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”* (1 Pet. 2:22 NIV) Therefore, he was the perfect sacrifice. As the Bible says in 2 Cor. 5:21 (NLT), *“For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.”*

When Christ shed his blood on the cross, our sins were forgiven. We’re no longer guilty. He has made us righteous before God.

But the story doesn’t end there because Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. By his resurrection, he has declared that he has conquered sin and death forever. And his promise is this, if you put your trust in Jesus, you too

will conquer sin and death forever. The Bible says, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

And Jesus himself promises, *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”*

In a few moments, I’m going to ask you to make a stand for Christ. If you want to receive Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, repent of your sins right now and then I’ll lead you into a prayer. Repenting of your sins means making a U-turn, instead of running away from God you’re now running toward him. You want to please him by doing things that are pleasing to him instead of continuing in a life of sin.

Friends, this is what Christmas did do. It gives us hope for the present and it gives us hope for the future. With Jesus, we need not fear anything. With Jesus, we can always be hopeful. To conclude, let me share with you this verse from Romans 15:13, *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*