

The Christ Candle

Christmas Day 2019

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(See Christ) Isaiah 52:7-10 - The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

(Listen to Christ) Hebrews 1:1-6 - Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days God has spoken to us by His Son

(Believe in Christ) -John 1:1-14 - But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Three Wednesdays ago, we focused on the first candle of the Advent wreath - the candle of hope, two weeks ago the candle of peace, one week ago the candle of joy, last night the candle of love, and this morning, the Christ Candle.

Mr Welder was a principal in the little high school I attended back in the late 60's and early 70's. He was a short stocky intimidating kind of a guy, the rumor was that he had been a boxer in his military days, he was the kind of a man you didn't want to mess with, and he had a habit of talking out of the side of the mouth. And so if a couple of my friends and I got the giggles in study hall, which we did one day because Brian was doing an imitation of Mr. Welder, he drew near, and out of the side of his mouth, he asked a simple question, "Muehlberg, Mindeman, Griffin, what's your problem?" (I don't remember how we answered, only that we stopped giggling for a time)

What's your problem? That's the question I invite you to ask on this Christmas Day morning, as we study our three appointed texts from the prophet Isaiah, the letter to the Hebrews, and the Gospel of John. "What's your problem? The prophet Isaiah will be helping us to address our problem of **inattentiveness to Christ**, the writer to the Hebrews will be helping us to address our **sin problem of not listening well to Christ**, and John will be helping us to address the most **dangerous problem of all, the sin of not believing in Christ**.

Our sermon theme today is The Christ Candle. *Three invitations the Holy Spirit would deliver from this pulpit today, the invitation to 1) See Christ clearly, 2) Listen well to Christ, and 3) Believe Christ.*

Invitation #1 on this first day of Christmas is to see Christ clearly.

I don't think I'm the only guy here who stumbles into inattentiveness on a pretty regular basis. Over the years, I have failed a number of times to notice that Debi had been to the hair stylist, on occasion I failed to notice she had rearranged the furniture, recently I sat for several hours near a carpet in our living room I didn't realize was new, and apparently about

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a month ago or so, I sat in my chair facing the Christmas tree she had put up and decorated and didn't see it.

Far more dangerous of course is when are inattentive to Christ, when we fail to see the salvation God has already provided free of charge by sending His beloved and only Son first to the manger, and then to the cross on our behalf. The prophet Isaiah is inviting the people of his day to be looking for the feet of those messengers who would be bringing the good news of victory back into the city of Jerusalem. He was inviting them to lift up their voices with the watchmen who would be seeing with their own eyes the return of the Lord to Zion.

This morning, dear friends, the Holy Spirit would invite us to bring all our sins of inattentiveness, all those times our good intentions have gone awry, all our mistakes, every one of our failures, every one of our faults, every one of our bad habits, bring them to his manger and then to his cross and see Christ clearly. See one more time that in Christ there is hope that is based on historical fact and it will help you go the distance. See that in Christ there is peace that is based on the birth and the death and the resurrection of Christ and it transcends all of human circumstances. See that in Christ there is a joy that comes along with the forgiveness of your sins, and see that in Christ, you have been loved with an everlasting love.

In response to all that Christ has done, we lift up our voices in these 12 days of Christmas, we sing together for joy, the Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and we rest in what we see clearly, the salvation of our God.

Invitation #2 on this first day of Christmas is to listen well to Christ.

A few months ago, I was attending a Lutheran Women's Missionary League event in North Mankato, and before the meeting, I greeted and then listened to a very pleasant and talkative woman telling me about her family and what was going on in her church. I was simply doing what I assume all members of polite society would do, I was looking her in the eyes, nodding my head, had a bit of a smile on my lips, and I was listening. And then quite abruptly, she stopped talking. She had this puzzled look on her face, and she said, "You're really listening to me, aren't you?" Now in my world, I don't think listening to a person for five minutes qualifies for sainthood, but in her world, this must have been a rare occurrence.

Far more dangerous of course is when we don't listen well to Christ and His inspired and inerrant Word, dangerous it is when growing numbers of people drift away from their local churches. Far more dangerous is when the sheep of His pasture rarely listen to the voice of their Good Shepherd. Far more dangerous is when the baptized and the confirmed people of God slowly but surely fall into a despising and neglecting of the preaching and teaching of God's Word.

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The context of our Epistle lesson for today is that many new Christians were half inclined to revert to Judaism. There were false teachers inviting them to obey the Old Testament laws of circumcision and ceremony instead of clinging to Christ and Christ alone. The whole point of this letter to the Hebrews is that Christ was and is a supreme treasure, He was and is superior to the Old Testament prophets, superior to OT covenant, superior to OT priesthood, superior to the Jerusalem Temple and Sanctuary, he offered up a superior sacrifice, and we learn again in these 12 days of Christmas that we sinners in every generation will be doing ourselves a huge favor by paying attention to God who in these last days has spoken to us by His Son.

In Hebrews chapter 1, we learn again that God's written Word is inspired, we listen in as the Spirit of God points us to Christ, He is the heir and the owner and the ruler of all, Christ is the very Creator of the universe who was willing to become a fertilized egg, grow and be formed in his mother's womb, and be born as a mere baby in a manger, Christ is the radiance of God's glory, He is the exact representation of His Father, to know Jesus is to know the glory of God, to this very day Jesus sustains all things by his powerful word,

In response to all of that, we resolve one more time in these 12 days of Christmas, to listen closely, to listen often, and to listen well to the preaching and teaching of God's Word. Faith cometh by hearing hearing by the Word of God.

If invitation # 1 was to see clearly the salvation God has provided in the person and work of Christ, and if invitation #2 was to listen well to Christ and His Word, then **Invitation #3 on this first day of Christmas is to believe Christ with all of our hearts and all of our souls and all of our minds.**

Finally, the apostle John would remind us today that Christ was in the beginning with God, and He was God. All things were made through Christ, without him nothing was made that was made. In Christ, we have the forgiveness of sins, and wherever there is forgiveness there is hope based on historical fact, there is peace based on the birth and the suffering and the death and the resurrection of Christ, there is joy based on knowing Christ who is sitting at the right hand of His Father, there is an everlasting love that will carry us through every chapter of life, no matter what.

I read this week that in 2009, 77 percent of Americans claim to be Christians, and ten years later, in 2019, the percentage had dropped 12 points down to 65. John writes this about first century people, He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God. So much of the joy of Christmas for many of us has to do with children and grandchildren and even great grandchildren coming home, the giving and receiving of gifts, the pleasant and the warm fuzzy privileges of spending family time together.

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One of the privileges of being in my family growing up was being the youngest of four children, and according to my sisters getting extra special attention they never received. You babies in the family know what I'm talking about. One of the earliest and fondest memories I have is of falling asleep in the car on the way home late at night, and being carried into the house by my strong and loving father. No doubt I pretended to be asleep one or more times, simply to know the pleasant and warm fuzzy feeling of being carried in and upstairs and placed gently in bed.

Of course all of that is secondary to the privilege of being a baptized and believing member of a local Church family. Here in the local church family we have been born again, here many of us have been instructed and catechized in the one true faith, here many of us have cried and laughed together, here in the local church we have gone through the ups and downs of life together, here we know what it means to rest in our heavenly father's promises, to be helped up and carried along by fellow Christians, and to look forward one day to falling asleep and waking up in the presence of Almighty God.

The kingdom of God is like a medium sized church in a medium sized city full of folks who have an answer to Mr. Welder asking out of the side of his mouth, "What's your problem?" In fact they have three answers. They have been inattentive to Christ, they haven't always listened well to Christ, some days they have a hard time believing in Christ. And as often as they admit their problems, that often the grace and the mercy of God is able to sweep over their souls, their sins are forgiven, their debt is cancelled. They believe with all their hearts and with all their souls and with all their minds that God loves them dearly, again and again the people and their watchmen lift up their voices, together they sing for joy. In Jesus' Name. Amen.