

**McCabe United Methodist Church**  
**The Purpose of Christmas (Part 2): A Time for Celebration**  
**Luke 2:8-10**  
**Pastor Ray Baker, 12-09-12**

Our children's Christmas program is today/Sunday, at 10:00. The children have learned their lines, picked out their costumes, and practiced their Christmas carols.

Two of my favorite roles in the Christmas are the Angels and the Shepherds. Angels are clean. Angels are beautiful. The angels are not messy like the shepherds. The angelic wear beautiful white robes. The proper attire for a shepherd is burlap; a rough, course material which is far from comfortable.

Do you know what real-life shepherds were like? Townspeople looked down on them, because they worked with sheep all day, sleep outside with the animals at night and then arrive in town dirty, and sweaty. They were like little boys who had spent a hot summer's day playing baseball in the cow pasture. When they shopped in the market people were nice to them, but everybody was happy when they moved along. Burlap fits the part.

In the Christmas Pageant the Angels wear halos, wings, and they enter to beautiful carols like "Hark the Herald Angels Sing." What about the shepherds? They're decked out in burlap robes as people sing about "the cattle lowing...." When we think of the nativity scene we recognize a simple barn is a good location for livestock, but not a suitable place for the birth of a child.

I think the reason the Son of God was born in a stable and be greeted by shepherds was to give a clear message the Christ Child came to save all of us. He entered the world among the lowly, but he lived his life where everyone could see him, so everyone had an opportunity to respond to the message Immanuel, God with us!

One day a mother was doing laundry. As she traveled from room to room her little boy followed her around the house. They went into the kitchen, on to the bedrooms, and finally to the laundry room. His mom turned to him and said: "Tim, what are you doing? Is there something that you want?" Tim said: "I just want to be with you."

I hope we share his attitude. I hope we desire to live our lives with God. If God were to ask you "What are you doing?" I hope you would answer, "I just want to be with you."

Over the last 25 years I've heard many people say: If Jesus came into the world today, he would be found among the poor, the homeless, the forgotten, the lonely, and the

sick. Of course, this is only half the story; because Jesus is actually among us now. Jesus is here through the presence of the Spirit. He is with the least, the last, and the lost. But, he's also right here...right now...with you and me.

That's the joy of celebrating Christmas. We are able to celebrate the original birth of the Christ Child 2000 years ago; we also celebrate him being born anew in our lives; and we celebrate to celebrate Christ's return.

Pastor Rick Warren wrote the book called: The Purpose of Christmas. One of the stories he tells is that when he was about five years old he asked mom about the meaning of Christmas. One of the comments she made was that Christmas is the time when we celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus. This made sense to a five year old boy. He knew all about birthdays. So he insisted the family through a birthday party for Jesus. They made all the preparations including a birthday cake with candles.

It's been fifty years since that first celebration and they have continued that tradition ever sense. Each year they bake a cake, decorate it with frosting and candles. The family sings "Happy birthday baby Jesus." Then, the youngest member of the family blows out the candles.

As we celebrate Christmas we should remember that God whispers to us in every candle, carol, and nativity scene: "You are mine and I love you."

A woman named: Charlene Elizabeth Fairchild wrote, "A Mustard Seed Christmas,"

It was the first Sunday in Advent and my husband ... rather gingerly, brought up the subject of Christmas, knowing that I was immersed in the full bloom of grief. Mom had died on Labor Day and this was the first Christmas to be marked without her. I did not "feel" like Christmas.

I remembered the reading from Romans that morning, "The night is far gone, the day is near .... let us put on the armor of light .... put on the Lord Jesus Christ." The season celebrating His birth and looking for His coming again was upon me and I was being called to participate. But it was beyond me to rejoice. As I said these things to my husband, he reminded me that God IS able even if I was not. He mentioned the parable of the mustard seed to me. God could take that little mustard seed and make of it something worthy. God could take that tiny seed of faith and grow it into a kingdom of hope.

I felt as if I had been touched. I got up and went to the kitchen and rifled through my spices. Yes! There it was. My bottle of mustard seeds. I got one out and grabbed a piece of paper from the pad by our phone and taped that mustard seed to the center. I returned to the dining room, waving the paper triumphantly.

"I've got it! I've got it! I CAN celebrate this year." My husband said, "Here, let's put it up on the mantel. It'll be our first Christmas decoration." Up it went. Every time I looked at it, I was reminded of the hope it symbolized and the faith it embodied. I couldn't do it on my own. But God could. And God did!

I can still remember the year my family celebrated Christmas, even though my grandfather died the afternoon of Christmas day. It was a sad day, but also a joyous day because we were surrounded by family and we told stories of remembrance around the Christmas tree. Grandpas' death seemed to bring the purpose of our Christmas celebration into focus. "Emmanuel, God with us."

The most important moments in life offer us a chance focus on the important times in our life. It doesn't matter if we are celebrating the joyous gift of a new born child, a marriage, or a graduation; or a tragic event like a natural disaster, a divorce, or the death of a loved on...these events offer us moments when life comes into focus we can see that having God in our lives is always enough....

Pastor Timothy Brown,  
"God Is in Every Frame,"  
Perspectives, May 1997, 24.

I remember a trip to the hospital just a few years ago. I was there to visit a beautiful young man from Spring Lake, Michigan, whose life was being robbed one blood cell at a time by a vicious and unrelenting leukemia. Because he was so weakened, I knelt next to his bed to look at him eyeball to eyeball. I said quietly, "Hi, Tim," and he responded faintly, "Hi, Tim." There followed an awkward pause because I didn't exactly know what to say. The long, dark shadow of death has a way of muffling through much of our otherwise meaningless "chitchat." Finally, Tim broke the deafening silence by saying gently, "I have learned something."

Now I knew at least this much -- you never trifle with the last words of a dying person, so I said, "Tell me, what have you learned?"

He said, again very faintly, "I have learned that life isn't like a VCR."

Perplexed, I said, "I don't get it. What do you mean?"

He said, drawing his next breath in pain, "Life isn't like a VCR -- you can't fast-forward the bad parts."

As I knelt there, fighting back the tears and trying to take it all in, he interrupted my awkward silence again by asking, "You know what else I learned?"

I said, "No, I really don't. Please tell me."

"I have learned," he whispered, "that Jesus Christ is in every frame, and right now it's just enough."

This year the majority of us will celebrate Christmas with light, trees, presents. The wrapping paper and boxes will fly. We will also gather around the table and eat an overabundance of food...saying later: "I ate too much;" or "I wish I had worn my stretchy pants."

But the truth is...if we set all that aside and celebrated by singing happy birthday baby Jesus...it would be more than enough.