

“The Christmas Presence”

Am I crazy or is the marketing of Christmas coming earlier and earlier? Several weeks before Thanksgiving, we were being barraged with commercials for online shopping. We hadn't even planned out the menu for the family gathering and we were being lured into joining the shopping frenzy of Black Friday and Cyber Monday. Merchants wanted the best Christmas ever and they got their wish. Black Friday set a new record this year with a whopping 5.03 billion in online revenue. Wait for it. Cyber Monday also hit a new record at 6.6 billion, as it was the largest online shopping day in U.S. history.

We all know that when it comes to our society celebrating Christmas, it is not about the miracle of Christ's birth. Clearly it comes down to whether or not the retailers can get out of the “red” and into the “black”. It is no surprise to say that Christmas is not defined by money or retail goals, but by the incredible miracle of Christ's birth. Christmas is much more than just the birth of a baby. It is when God became a man, which is a miracle we call the Incarnation. Even my grandkids understand the meaning of miracles.

Simply, it is the ultimate and final disclosure of the eternal God. Can you grasp that? It answers for us the mystery of who God is, what God is like, and what God wants. The Incarnation is the self-revelation of God Himself, the pre-existent Son of God and the second person of the Trinity taking human form. Jesus is the “fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). In the Incarnation, *“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:14 NKJV). The Word here is the name of the Eternal God and the flesh is the designation of a time-bound human being in contrast to God. God sent His Son born of a woman. Yet the Word, who is God, continues to be what He was before becoming flesh (John 1:1). Try to explain all that on CNN.

I always like to ask the question after hearing something profound, “So what? How does that impact my life?” When my grandson wants me to understand something obvious he says, “Did you get it grandpa?” The whole idea of God involving Himself in the affairs of my personal life by coming to earth is just life changing. This incredible intervention of God into the world (Philippians 2:7) comes with tremendous results. First, the eternal love of God is revealed to the entire world in its fullest expression. All that believe will have eternal life (John 3:16). Second, He who shared His flesh and blood (Hebrews 2:14) causes us who believe to share in the same divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). Third, Jesus who committed no sin was made sin that we who believe might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). Lastly, Jesus who came to reconcile the world to Himself has given us the same work of reconciliation to a lost world (2 Corinthians 5:19).

My prayer for us this Christmas is that our celebration would go far beyond traditional cultural symbols such as decorative lights, festive parties and lavish gift-giving. May our focus be upon the celebration of the “Gift of God” that is meant to provide eternal life through Jesus Christ. *“Tis the season to be jolly”* then has nothing to do with the decked halls of holly. It's about the One who loves this broken world more than we can even imagine.

Karen and I are living out this Christmas reality as we face our own challenge with cancer. Are we despairing? Not for a second. Have we lost hope? Nope. Are we at peace? Most assuredly. Though this diagnosis of cancer has been a challenge to deal with, we are in His will. We know He is in control and will bring about all these things for His glory. We are rejoicing in Him this Christmas and trust you are as well. Thanks for your wonderful prayers during this most difficult time.

I am blessed and honored to serve as your Regional Director for CB North Central. I look forward to serving you for years to come. Karen and I would like to wish you, your family and your church a wonderful Christ-filled Christmas. All praise goes to the Incarnate One.

Pat Phinney

CB North Central, Regional Director