

## **Christmas Unwrapped: *God's Welcome Home* - Advent wk 1**

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - Dec. 6, 2020

We are in the season of Advent, which is four weeks leading up to Christmas Day. During Advent we anticipate the advent of Jesus birth on the first Christmas morning in Bethlehem. And as we anticipate, I think it's normal that we have a mix of emotions. Feelings of joy for family, and feelings of loss for the family who are not with us.

Expectations of gifts and fears of disappointments. And if we turn on the news, we see it's not all peace and joy.

Christmas can be a time that offers hope, when we see God's gift under all the holiday wrapping paper. Long ago, God began getting ready for a special gift. The gift is Jesus. Did you know that Jesus life, death, and resurrection was God's plan from the very beginning?

The Christmas actually begins long before Jesus' birth - even before God breathed the first breath of life into Adam's body in Genesis 1. From the very beginning, God had a plan for redemption. I'd like to read for you a passage that speaks of this "from the beginning" plan God had. Colossians 1:15, 19-20 says,

**The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation...**

**For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on**

**earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.**

From the beginning, the Bible tells of a love story between God and people. As the story works its way through the Old Testament into the New Testament, it is a story with many ups and downs and twists and turns, but the ending is always clear- redemption is God's plan, and God will stop at nothing to fulfill that plan and rescue His people.

And so God sent Jesus. There's a mystery here. God actually gift-wrapped Himself in all His fulness, in human flesh, and was born in a dusty stable so He could come and live among us and offer us life and salvation, gifts that we could never gain on our own. God wanted to redeem us.

Redemption is one of humanity's greatest hopes. When something, anything, goes wrong, we hope for something good somehow to come out of it. We hope for redemption to turn it around, to make it good again.

It's sometimes one of life's big questions, "*What's this all for? What's it mean? Why do we exist?*" When life is perplexing or painful, God offers redemption that will turn things around for good and it's been God's plan from the beginning.

Jesus is God on a rescue mission to redeem all creation, so we can fully know the goodness of God. And so we

say Christmas is a season of joy. There is no time of year like the Christmas season. Ordinary time and space are taken over by a sense of wonder and reverence and merriment. Even though Christmastime is often filled with busyness and activity, at the heart of the season is joy.

That is as it should be for, Christmas is meant to be the celebration of the One who came to give us life, to shower us with love, Jesus is God under wraps, showing us the goodness and love of God. And during Christmas there is no one more joyful than God Himself, because *Christmas is about God getting His kids back.*

Here is what Jeremiah wrote of God's word about us His children. Ephraim being God's people.

**"Oh! Ephraim is my dear, dear son, my child in whom I take pleasure!  
Every time I mention his name, my heart bursts with longing for him!  
Everything in me cries out for him. Softly and tenderly I wait for him." *God's Decree.***

Our Father in heaven loves us.

Consider God's approach to us, on that first Christmas morning. On the very first Christmas Day, God was certainly joyful because He was getting His children back. His from the beginning rescue plan was set into motion. And He couldn't contain His excitement; so He had to tell

someone, so He sent His angels to proclaim the good news:

Luke 2:8-14 MSG,

**8-12 There were shepherds camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."**

**13-14 At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises: *Glory to God in the heavenly heights, Peace to all men and women on earth who please him.***

All of heaven was rejoicing that day, for joy was birthed into the world! God, in the form of a tiny baby, was running to meet us, to rescue us and welcome us home at Christmas.

The story of Christmas is the middle part of a long story of God's love for us. It's the middle of the journey where redemption is found. The next step in the story is enjoying our lives as God's children. We echo the angels when we hear the good news. God's rescue plan has begun in Bethlehem, a Savior has been born. *Glory to God, peace on earth and in our hearts!*

Would you pray with me?

*Heavenly Father, I am Yours by adoption. You go beyond redemption and justification and reconciliation, and You adopt me into Your family. When I was lost and kept wandering from You, You went searching for me and brought me into Your home. You could have left me on the street. But no, You adopted me! And now, like every other adopted son or daughter, You treat me like Jesus the only-begotten Son of the Father. You now bestow on me the same status and dignity the only-begotten has had from all eternity! You did not have to do it. You did not have to take me into Your Family, into You as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But You did! I am Yours by adoption. Amen. (By Rev. Darrell Johnson)*