

The Crisis of Christmas Part 3: Meet Me At The Stove!

If you are visiting with us this morning, welcome! We are glad you are here!
I want to take just a minute and bring you up to speed on what we have been talking about here at Christ's Church for the last month.

Our theme has been, "The Crisis of Christmas."
In a nut shell, the crisis of Christmas is that Jesus Christ is slowly disappearing from the Christmas celebration.

Just this week, on Friday, I was at the Target Store and I wanted to pick up a little manger scene that could be placed on a shelf. I looked all over the store, I looked all around the Christmas decoration isles, but I couldn't find one. I asked an employee where they were and he said, "We don't carry that."

As I later went through the check out line with another item, the cashier said, "Happy Holidays." I smiled and said, "Merry Christmas!" She then smiled and said, "Oh, thank you for saying that, we're not allowed to say Merry Christmas unless the customer says it first. So, Merry Christmas!"

If we aren't very careful, we can be swept away by all this and completely miss the Christ of Christmas. And I think that would be a Christmas Crisis.
Commercialism, materialism, shopping, parties, decorations, school programs, office parties, political correctness.....all unwittingly conspire to relegate Jesus to an afterthought.

We may squeeze in a worship service or two during the Christmas season, to appease our conscience, but by and large most of our Christmas activities and festivities are void of any discernable presence of Jesus Christ.

Contrast that to the very first Christmas.
Consider the wise men. They are a great example of how Christmas should be celebrated.

Matthew 2:1-2, 11

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem
2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."
11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

The magi, or wise men, did two things when they came to Jesus.

1. They worshiped Him.
2. They gave Him gifts.

A true Christmas celebration should begin with the worship of Jesus Christ.
Worship is the proper response to Jesus Christ.

The wise men first of all worshiped Jesus. But then they gave him gifts.

Let me ask you a question: Who usually gets gifts on Christmas?
Are there any presents under your Christmas tree for Jesus? Who's birthday are we celebrating??
I'm not saying that giving gifts to others is bad. In fact, it's good!
I'm only asking, what happened to Jesus? Shouldn't Jesus be the first one on the list for gifts?

We want to turn that emphasis around here at Christ's Church.

Along that line, please watch this video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xj44tOP9pL4>

If a decision is made to give a gift to Jesus, how do you do that?
How can we give a physical gift to Jesus? He's in heaven right now, at the right hand of the Father.
Short of running up to heaven, how can we give a gift to Jesus?
The answer is found in the Gospel of Matthew:

Matthew 25:40 "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

Jesus said that whatever we've done to the "least of these" you've done to Him.
That's what this stove is all about!
In Peru, 40% of the population cook on open flame stoves.
That's approximately 9 million people!
These open flame stoves are in their homes, and so the smoke is trapped inside of the home.

Smoke inhalation causes a variety of diseases, which all contribute to a shortened life span.
It also increases the infant mortality rate.

The solution is simple: build enclosed stoves equipped with a chimney.
Then the smoke is directed out of the houses.
The problem is, these stoves cost money to build. Money which these people simply don't have.

Therefore, we are going to receive a special offering today which will be used to build these more efficient, enclosed stoves in Peru.
And because of it's obvious symbolism, we are going to place our offering inside of this special stove!

We've titled this, "Meet Me At The Stove."
But that's not what I want.
What I really want is for you to meet Jesus at the stove.
Just like many in Peru will do because of your gifts today.

So, two things we're going to do this morning:

1. We're going to worship Jesus.
2. We're going to give gifts to Jesus.

We are all going to sing Christmas carols as we share in corporate worship. While that is going on, in the midst of our worship, we encourage you to come forward for a moment of individual or family worship. You can come by yourself or with family and friends. The rest of us will continue to worship the Lord together.

Let me explain a few things about coming forward:

1. Nobody "has to" come forward. This is not a legalistic thing. If you aren't comfortable coming up here, that's OK. If you want to make a donation to the well project but don't want to come up here, simply use the special offering envelope in your bulletin and place it in the offering plate later in the service. (By the way, make your checks out to Christ's Church.)

2. I encourage you to kneel and pray before making your gift in the well.

There are lots of ways to worship: standing, sitting, head bowed, hands folded, hand lifted up.....all of these are good. The bible also talks about kneeling before the Lord.

Psalms 95:6 "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker."

Philippians 2:9-11

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

You don't have to kneel, you can stand, but I'd encourage you that if you are able, why not bow before the Lord as you come to His altar.

3. After you have said a quick prayer and had a moment of individual worship, you can then place your gift in the stove: Remembering that Jesus said, "Whatever you've done to the least of these brothers of mine, you've done for me."

Then return to your seats and continue to worship with the rest of us.

4. By the way, we have some gift certificates in the foyer. One possibility for you to consider is that instead of giving a tie or a toy or a fruit cake or something that somebody doesn't really need to begin with, you can make a donation in their name and give them a certificate telling them that a donation has been made in their name. (This is all on the honor system, just put the fit in the well and then pick up a certificate and fill it out and give it to them)

Let's worship the Lord. And if you so desire, during this time you can give your gifts to Jesus.