

**Sonoraville Baptist Church**  
**Sunday, December 5, 2010 – 11:00 AM**  
**Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor**

**Christmas Is... - John 3:16**

**Introduction:** Christmas means a lot of things to different people. To some Christmas is all about shopping and Santa Claus. To others, Christmas is an excuse to party. To some Christmas is when they have to do a lot of traveling or a lot of entertaining. Others may see Christmas as a time to get off from work for a few days. While for others, Christmas is just another reminder of how lonely they are or how much they miss a loved one.

Recently, “Kids Turn Central,” a web site for kids asked about 75 teenagers what Christmas meant to them. Here is a sampling of their responses:

- To me Christmas means having fun, eating, drinking eggnog also it is about celebrating the birthday of Jesus. (13 - NY)
- Christmas to me is a celebration of capitalism and a time where we pretend that our good behavior for the day will carry over to the rest of the year. (15 - KA)
- Christmas is a time to feel a spirit of joy and peace. It is a time to connect and feel especially close and thankful for family. It is a cozy time (14 - IN)
- Christmas means you have to give things to poor people. (13 - AZ)
- I'm an ordinary teenager and just being real. Christmas is shopping and buying new clothes and shoes. (17 - CA.)

I found a parody of Luke's account of the birth of Christ that really underscores just how far our world has let the true meaning of Christmas slip away from them.

*"And there were in the same country children keeping watch over there stockings by the fireplace. And lo! Santa Claus came upon them, and they were sore afraid. And Santa said unto them `Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy that is for all people who can afford them. For unto you will be given great feasts of turkey, dressing and cake; and many presents; and this shall be a sign unto you, ye shall find the presents, wrapped in bright paper, lying beneath a tree adorned with tinsel, colored balls and lights. And suddenly, there will be with you a multitude of relatives and friends, praising you and saying, `thank you so much, it was just what I wanted.' And it shall come to pass as the friends and relatives have gone their way to their own homes, the parents shall say to one another, What a mess to clean up! I'm tired, let's go to bed and pick it up tomorrow. Thank goodness, Christmas only comes once a year!' And they go with haste to their bed and find their desired rest."*

I don't know if that describes what Christmas means to you, but it does describe what it means to a lot of folks based on their actions, right?

Ultimately, if we want to come to a true understanding of what Christmas is, we must to turn to the source of Christmas. What does God say that Christmas is?

In John's Gospel we read what I believe is the greatest Christmas verse we could find in God's Word. John wrote: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* **John 3:16 (NIV)**

I don't believe there is a better way to describe what Christmas means to the world than this. Why! Well, you cannot improve on perfection. No one could outdo what God has done, and no one could give a greater gift than God has already given.

For the next few minutes, I want to use this verse to help us focus this great gift God gave the world at Christmas, and how we can use Christmas as a time to consider the impact He has made. First, I see in this verse is that Christmas is...

### **1. A Time to Remember**

Christmas is a good time for us to pause and remember just how much God loves the world. Specifically, God sending His only Son into the world should cause us to think about the great love that God had for each and every one of us individually and personally. God loved us so much, that He was willing to part with His only Son, send Him to this planet, to live among people whom He knew would reject Him, torture Him, and ultimately kill Him – all so that we might be saved.

But not only should we remember that God sent His Son, we should also use this time to remember that His Son grew to become the one who changed the world. Christmas is a good time to remember how Jesus impacted the world through His teaching. In Matthew's Gospel, after Jesus had preached that great Sermon on the Mount, the Bible says, "*When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.*" **Matthew 7:28-29 (NIV)**. His teaching and preaching was absolutely life-changing.

Jesus' impact was also evident in His miracles. Once when He healed a paralytic, the Bible says that the people who had crowded around them "...were filled with awe, and they praised God." (**Matthew 9:8 (NIV)**).

But the thing we should remember most about Jesus at Christmas is not so much His birth, but His death and resurrection. For had He just been born and died, His life would not have meant any more than anyone else's. But because Jesus gave His life on the cross, then came back to life and is alive today, we can have eternal life. That is something to remember!

So Christmas is not just a time to remember Jesus' birth, but also a time to remember, cherish and proclaim the good news of His life mission and message. Next, I see here that Christmas is...

## **2. A Time to Love**

I can't prove it, but it just seems as though some people make a special effort to be a little more generous during the Christmas season. Whether it's being involved in such things as Christmas caroling, collecting or donating toys for the needy, or preparing or serving meals for the homeless, it seems like there are more people involved in charitable and humanitarian efforts during this time of the year than at other times.

The meaning of Christmas itself is wrapped up in unselfish giving and sacrifice from a heart of love. That is what God did for us when He wrapped His Son in human flesh, and sent Him to a waiting and needy and desperate world. So, Christmas is a time for reaching out to others with the same love and concern God had for us.

God so loved the world - let us never forget that! In everything we do - our preaching, teaching, and ministries, may they all be done from an overflowing heart of love for God and others. May everything we do be done motivated by a love and concern for lost sinners. That is the way God cares for us, so we should care as He cares and love as He loves.

But not only is Christmas a time to Remember and a time to Love, according to John 3:16, Christmas is also...

## **3. A Time to Give**

John says, "*For God so loved the world, that He gave...*" Love can't look with indifference or condition on the plight of the hungry, the sick, the lonely and lost souls of this world. Love must give, and give without reservation or prejudice.

God gave all He could give. He gave His only begotten Son, and His gift was given freely, lovingly, and graciously to everyone - no matter what their social or economic status; and was given even though no one deserves it. This fact is clearly seen in main characters in the story of Jesus' birth:

- Mary and Joseph were common working class people.
- The first birth announcement and invitation was sent to a motley crew of dirty, low-life shepherds - an occupation that was despised and ridiculed in those days.
- The Wise Men were well-to-do royal astrologers from the east who came to worship the Messiah and bring Him gifts.
- Simeon was an old man and Anna was an old widow woman. But they were both labeled as religious fanatics and were probably mocked and ridiculed because they just hung around the Temple all day getting in people's way.

None of the cast of characters in the Christmas story would have gotten the part had we been directing the scene, but God loved them all. And in His sovereign grace, God granted them favor to be included in the story of that first Christmas, and their lives were never the same. God gave them the opportunity of a lifetime to have a part in the birth of the Savior of the world.

Today, God is still giving. He's giving us life and health and peace and so many things, we could not count them all. But primarily He's giving men and women, boys and girls all over the world an opportunity to become a part of His forever family.

**Conclusion:** So as we enter this Christmas season, may we always remember to love as God loved and give as God gave to us. May we remember to forgive others as God forgave us. Use this time to remember how far God has lifted us up, and thank Him for His grace and mercy. May we pray daily for God to transform us from a life of self-indulgence into a life driven by a new purpose and desire to live for God and glorify Him.

We've just scratched the surface of the meaning and the message of Christmas, but I hope someone has heard enough today to renew their faithfulness and commitment to Christ. I hope someone has heard enough to help them get their song back. I hope someone has heard enough to cause them to stop and think – *"I can't celebrate the true meaning of Christmas because I really don't know Jesus as my Savior."* I pray that God's Holy Spirit has motivated you to ask Jesus into your life.

For someone here today, this may be your new beginning. This may be your ticket to freedom from the penalty of sin. If so, then I invite you to come and experience what Christmas really is all about – that Jesus came to seek and save those who are lost. Come to Jesus right now.