

## IN PURSUIT OF THE CHRIST CHILD



### *Scriptures:*

### **Hebrews 2:10-13 & 16-18**

<sup>10</sup>It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. <sup>11</sup>For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, <sup>12</sup>saying, 'I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.' <sup>13</sup>And again, 'I will put my trust in him.' And again, 'Here am I and the children whom God has given me.'

<sup>16</sup>For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. <sup>17</sup>Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup>Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

### **Matthew 1:18-25**

<sup>18</sup>Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. <sup>20</sup>But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' <sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: <sup>23</sup>'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,' which means, 'God is with us.' <sup>24</sup>When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, <sup>25</sup>but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.



### **THE DAY AFTER CHRISTMAS**

It's the day after Christmas. The presents have long since been opened, the Christmas dinner leftovers have the refrigerator filled to capacity. The dirty dishes are almost all loaded in the dishwasher. One more load and the bottom of the sink may even be visible. The wrapping paper has found its way into the now overflowing trash can. "O" Christmas, the joy of Christmas.

I hope your Christmas day was joyful. I hope your whole Christmas season was meaningful, but now it is over. Ah, you can sit down now, relax, and take a deep breath. There are no more presents to wrap, or food to prepare, or Christmas cards to send.

Now you can spend a few minutes and enjoy the gifts you received. But you have to find where you put them first. I can't find that new book that my brother sent. I sure hope it didn't get thrown out with all the wrapping paper.

**I do have a question to ask:  
Where is the baby?  
I hope Jesus is around somewhere,  
but sometimes it sure is hard to find him,  
especially the day after Christmas.**

In all the hectic activities, in all the parties, the family get-togethers, the shopping, and the cooking, Jesus sometimes gets lost or left out of our celebrations. Jesus the brand new baby gets forgotten and left behind.

“Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” Matthew 1:20

## **THANKSGIVING**

Just last month I spent Thanksgiving with my family in southern California. There were thirty-seven people for dinner at my sister Peggy’s house. Seven of the thirty-seven in attendance were under the age of six; one, Emmett LaCroix, my niece Stephanie’s first child, was just five weeks old. All thirty adults practically lined up to take turns holding the little guy. It was late Friday afternoon before I got my turn. You know the three three-years-olds were highly sought after as well. We adults all wanted a chance to have time with them. Ava, my nephew Paul’s three-year old little girl was so much fun; I told Liz at the end of the weekend that I wished we had an Ava to take home with us.

All these kids had such energy and enthusiasm, and had surprising memories of events we did in Thanksgiving’s past. How does a three year remember the home-made ice cream we made the year before? I had totally forgotten we had made it, but Ava sure didn’t forget. There was no way one of those seven kids would be forgotten or left behind during the Thanksgiving weekend or the weeks since. In fact a day hasn’t passed when I didn’t think of them.

So why is it the day after Christmas and the Christ child is gone missing in most of our lives.

That little baby is hard to find through all the parties, the wrapping paper, the rich food.

But as we celebrate Christmas, the end of the old year and the beginning of the new, people once again have looked to the east in hope of finding what we all so much need. Dawn has broken upon us in the birth of a baby, a Messiah. Once more God-with-us has been born in our hearts, there to illuminate our lives with the brilliant warmth of God’s peace and hope. Love the Lord is now with each and every one of us.

## **LOOKING TO THE EAST**

Eleanor Farjeon, a British author who penned the Advent hymn, “People, Look East,” as well as “Morning Has Broken,” had to have been a morning person. She writes about hope, about the beauty of life so passionately.

But I did some research on her and found out her life was anything but. You see Eleanor Farjeon was a shy home schooled child who was in poor health, with poor eyesight and who spent the majority of her days in an attic stacked with books. Apparently her infirmities did not dampen what had to be a resilient spirit, even in the midst of the cold, harsh reality of winter.

She wrote, “Birds, though you have long ceased to build, guard the nest that must be filled. Even the hour when wings are frozen God for fledging time has chosen.”

This year’s Christmas season has been accompanied by the cold, harsh reality of winter, literally and figuratively, a poor economy, a very lean job market, and growing numbers of home foreclosures. If our own giving tree experience is any indication the numbers of hungry, needy families in Sonoma County is not diminishing.

Perhaps we are like Eleanor Farjeon and we retreat up into the attic. We likely spent the early weeks of December rummaging around our attics looking for treasures. We stumbled upon the neatly packed nativity. The one that was passed down to us from our parents, or perhaps we found the one our children or grandchildren made with Popsicle

sticks in Sunday school. It's the crèche that has made the rounds: it's been there through the good years and the bad, the comings and the goings of life, springs and winters.

You no doubt set the nativity in a prominent place in your house, on the coffee table, or on the living room mantel. It was placed where everyone who came into your house could see it. And the baby Jesus was center stage, reminding us of Matthew's words, "Look the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us.'"

So once more we have looked to the east. The question we have to ask ourselves is: Will we keep looking east throughout the year?

**As we prepare for a new year,  
will we keep the Christ child close  
at hand all year and will we be  
mindful of where he is?**

**Will we line up  
to take our turn to hold him?**

**For it is only in our willingness to hold  
him that he is in turn able to hold us.**

**In our quest, our needs  
will become his needs.**

### **A NEW YEAR - 2011**

So we turn our eyes to 2011, a new year, new goals, new objectives, new hope. As a member of our church's Session I know that our year-end committee reports will need to be written in the next few weeks. I have to admit that is one of the least favorite tasks I do as an elder.

This will be the fifth straight year I will have written the report for the Children and Youth Committee. I have come to realize there are only so many ways I can tell about the work of my committee in a new and creative way, a way in which you hopefully will want to read it. And yet in spite of my lack of motivation to write the report, it has to be included as part of our Church's Annual Report. As good Presbyterians, we always have the

need to document what we have done in the year past.

I don't doubt there is some value in this type of reporting. It is good to be able to go back and look at old reports to see historically how we have changed. Have we grown numerically or reduced our membership in the past year? Have we increased our financial giving, has our Church and World giving gone up, and did we have more or fewer children attending Sunday school classes?

The information gleaned from the Annual Report can be very useful. But it has a real short-coming in that it can't really report on the spiritual health of our church. How can you really measure if people are maturing and growing in their faith?

We often seem to focus on declining membership and reduced offering income as a sign that we somehow are falling short as a church community, rather than focusing on whether we are transforming the lives of people. Did you personally grow in your faith this past year? If you didn't, then we as a church need to discuss how we can make that happen.

### **IN PURSUIT**

I know personally that the 8:30 Sunday morning Bible study has really jump-started my faith journey this year. Maybe it will be just what you need also. If that time or venue isn't right for you, let's work together to search out ways that we can help bring your faith to a new level of importance in your everyday life.

I do find it interesting in our scripture reading from Hebrews that the writer in verse 16-18 says, "For it is clear that he (meaning Jesus) did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested."

My friends, I find this to be very good news. God didn't send Jesus for the benefit of the angels.

The angels didn't need God's help. No, God sent Jesus to help the descendants of Abraham. That's you and me. That's us, the average people who struggle with all of life's challenges, people who have good days and bad, people who make mistakes, who forget what is most important in life. We are people who get so caught up in the American view of what Christmas should be that we often forget what the real message and meaning is.

## **WHAT A CHRISTMAS PRESENT**

God sent Jesus to live among us so that God might experience first hand the struggles we face in life here on earth. Jesus came here to help us. We need to allow him to work with us and through us. I just can't think of a better Christmas present than that.

If we focus individually on transforming our faith, it can't help but become contagious with those around us. There is nothing more inviting to first time visitors than seeing caring, committed people living out their faith. When we work through the hard questions of life, when we deal with loss together, when we bond and grow with one another, people will see it and want to be a part of it.

**When believers hold the baby close,  
people slowly start to form a line  
so they, too, can have a turn.**

Once I finally got a turn to hold baby Emmitt at Thanksgiving, I didn't want to give him up. His mom asked me several times if I was tired of holding him.

"No, no," my reply was, "I'm doing just fine."

When I did finally hand him over to the next set of awaiting arms, I was happy to share him. You know, somehow having had a turn holding him brought me closer to everyone who preceded me and followed me in experiencing what only the new life of a baby can give: the joy, the peace, the hope. It's what Advent and Christmas is all about?

I had a turn holding the baby yesterday on Christmas morning. I hope you did too. If not, there is plenty of time to get your chance. The pursuit is more than worth it.

Pray with me: O God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, we come to you, our Lord and our God, with Christmas in our hearts and a baby in our arms. We come knowing that you came to help, to assist us in our journey here on earth. We come knowing that the journey will be much more satisfying, much more rewarding if you are leading us on our way.

We look forward to a new year, to new opportunities to serve you, to pursue the Christ child, to pursue your goals and to follow your lead.

We pray these things in Christ's name, saying the prayer he taught us, (The Lord's Prayer). Amen



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