

# **Let's Celebrate Jesus! And The World Will Notice**

**Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14**

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AUDIO - <http://fbcjc.buzzsprout.com/7678/133912>

As your pastor, I would like to coach you (us) this Advent on how to celebrate in a way that makes the Holy Season: 1) richer for you; 2) a blessing to those around you as we share our faith. How do we celebrate Jesus in such a way that the world notices? Years ago, I heard someone say that the world parties in order to forget; believers celebrate in order to remember. So how do we celebrate?

I. LET'S KEEP CHRIST AT THE CENTER. I'm not sure we really do that. And let me add: keeping Christ at the center of Christmas involves more than complaining that the world does not do that! About this time each year, letters to the editor start appearing in newspapers, blogs and Facebook posts begin to appear about how "they" have taken Christ out of Christmas. Public schools used to sing songs of the faith. Store clerks at Penney's and Dillard's used to say "Merry Christmas," now they are forced to say, "Happy Holidays." The courthouse lawn used to house a nativity scene. I guess I have a different take on all this. It's not the courthouse's job to teach and share our faith. It's not the public school's job to share Jesus with the world. It's ours. The Christmas story belongs to us.

I like the words of Rachel Held Evans in one of her blogs, don't believe the rumors that established government has chased God out. The established government of Rome couldn't keep God out of the world that first Christmas! Why would we farm it out to others and ask them to do our work? And by the way, "Happy Holidays" isn't so bad. The word "holiday" means holy day. In other words, our best witness to the world is not whining but celebrating. And if we celebrate correctly, it will be contagious.

For all of our talk (and whining) about the commercialization of Christmas and what "they" have done, much of the fault is in the mirror. Listen to St. Paul in Romans 13. Do we really celebrate Jesus with this kind of intensity and passion? We have so much to celebrate. One of my favorite things about being your pastor is hearing all the creative ways you practice keeping Christ at the center. Reading the Christmas story from Luke 2 before you open gifts; doing family projects for needy people during Advent; using an Advent calendar or Advent wreath to mark the days leading up to Dec. 25. And more!

II. LET'S LIVE OUR HOPE. Just as celebrating is more than partying, so hoping is more than wishing. Wishing means "I'm not sure this is really going to happen" (I may wish for the Royals and Cardinals to play all their home games in Jefferson City, but it isn't likely). Hope, biblical hope, means the promise is very sure; it's just a matter of time before it's delivered.

And I'd like to ask you who are not yet followers of Jesus: do you have hope? Would you like to have hope? Would you be willing to come into a relationship with Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah?

Now I want to read our other Advent text, Isaiah 2:1-5. I want you to notice the contrast between what presently IS and what WILL BE (how things appear to be vs. how they are in God's reality). [READ THE TEXT].

So why do we read these passages every Advent? The world is so far from this, it isn't even close. Don't you get it? The more we hear the hope, the more likely we'll start living the hope. And the world will notice if we start living our hope. Shane Claiborne tells of a welder-buddy of his who took an AK-47 and melted it down, and right before his eyes, fashioned it into a shovel and a rake! [*Sojourners*, December, 2013, p. 17]. What did you say, Isaiah? "...they shall beat their swords into plowshare, and their spears into pruning hooks..." (Is. 2:4).

Notice I said "live the hope," not just sing and talk about it. Note the participatory language of Isaiah 2. "Let us...teach us...that we may walk..." Not long ago one of our faithful members celebrated her 80th birthday. Her family asked her what she wanted to do to mark such a milestone. I loved her reply. "I don't want a reception. I don't want a cake. I don't want a party. I want a work day!" They all met at her house in gloves and work clothes. They did clean-up, fix-up all day long. They celebrated! Maybe that's what Jesus wants for his birthday. For us to live our hope in such a way that we work for peace, blessing and wellbeing of others. That we do his work.

So let's celebrate Jesus...by keeping Jesus at the center; by living our hope. And maybe the world will notice.