

Anybody here ever heard of Zeno's paradoxes? Zeno of Elea was a Greek philosopher who lived in the fifth century before the time of Jesus. His paradoxes were about movement, about getting from one point to another.

Now this is kind of freaky stuff, but let's see if I can make it clear. Let's say stand over here at this wall and I want to get to that wall over there. You might think I just need to walk from here over to there, but Zeno said it's not that easy. He said that before I can walk all the way over there I have to walk to here – halfway between where I started and where I wanted to go. But, I can't just walk here, either, because before I walk to this point, halfway between my starting and finishing lines, I have to walk to this point – halfway between my starting point and that halfway point. But before I can walk to here, I have to walk to this point, halfway between the starting line and that point. But before I can walk to this point.... Am I making this clear? Zeno said before you can go any final destination, you have to go halfway there, and halfway to that, but first halfway to that.... The end result? You don't move.

Now you might think, that's a pretty silly problem. Just get up and move, go to the other wall! But talk to mathematicians and they will tell you Zeno's paradoxes are still not fully resolved! That problem – Zeno's paradox – confounded the ancients; they had no answer to it. There is no universally accepted solution even today.

That ends your philosophy and math lesson for today, now let's turn to our spelling words. Get your notebooks out and use a number two pencil to write down the following words.

Why do I tell you about Zeno's paradoxes? Because Christmas for many people – for many Christian people – is a holiday that moves them spiritually about as much as you can move according to Zeno and his paradox. For lots of people Christmas is not about spiritual movement – you know, learning, serving, growing their relationship with Jesus – it's about physical movement from one location to the other. People travel from state to state, from country to country, from store to store, from party to party, from shopping website to shopping website, but they don't travel very much spiritually.

Think about the way we hear people talk this time of year: I've got most of my Christmas shopping done. I've still got to get something for so and so and so and so. It's as if on the journey from this wall where I have no shopping done, to that wall where I have all my shopping done, I am this far. Making progress – feeling good eleven days out – but I am not there yet.

Some people talk the same way about their baking. I always bake 500 dozen cookies, but I still have a hundred dozen left. I am this far along in my trip from none done to all done.

That's the way we talk this time of year. The journey to Christmas day is a bunch of projects and tasks that need to be done. But we rarely hear people say things like, I'm halfway done in my Bible study of the Christmas stories of Jesus. I'm reading them section by section to compare them, then I'm making myself some notes that I use for my prayer time. Nobody talks like that – nobody has that kind of project to complete this time of year, do they?

Nobody says, here's my plan to grow my relationship with Jesus this Christmas. I'm about 2/3 done right now. We're too busy with the details, or too turned off by the details, or too overwhelmed with the details to talk about Christmas in a spiritual manner.

But that's gotta change because at its core Christmas is about our moving forward spiritually – moving from one point to another point on our spiritual walks with Jesus.

We're at the midpoint of a relatively brief sermon series called "Christmas Classified" in which we're talking about some of the basic characteristics of the Christmas story. Two weeks ago we identified promise as an important theme of this season. God promised Zechariah and Elizabeth, and Joseph and Mary they would each give birth to a child. The Old Testament prophets witnessed to the promise of God to intervene with light into a dark and lonely world.

Last week we explored a related theme, hope. We said we can't know the hope of Jesus' coming until we identify our own hopelessness.

And today our Christmas theme is journey, our movement from one spiritual location – notice I said spiritual – to another if Christmas is to have the impact God wants it us to have on us.

Journeys are all over the Christmas stories in the Bible. The shepherds. Tending to their sheep, they receive a visit from an angel who tells them the messiah is born in Bethlehem. And after the angel leaves, they shrug their shoulders and go back to their flock! No. They send their friends the first ever Christmas cards and then decide how much they're going to spend on presents. No. They run into the city to see the messiah.

Hear the journey? The angel told them about the savior, but if they were going to meet him themselves, they had to take a trip – they had to leave their present location and move in the direction of Jesus.

Or the wisemen. They see a star and go back to work. No. They see the star, update their Facebook pages to tell all their friends what a delightful night they had, then go back to bed. No. They follow the star that leads them to Jerusalem and Herod, then to Bethlehem, where they offer gifts to the newborn Jesus. A journey.

More journey awaits the wisemen on the way home, right. God directs them to a different path home. In part to avoid Herod, and in part, I think, to symbolize the spiritual fact that we don't walk away from Jesus the same as when we found him. He has a way of changing us.

There are other characters in the Christmas story. How about after Jesus is born, when Mary and Joseph present him in the temple. There's Simeon and Anna. Of Simeon, Luke says he was devout and righteous – which says something about the way he had conducted the journey of his life. Luke also says Simeon was eager for the messiah to come, and happened to be in the temple when Mary and Joseph brought their new child. Because he made the temple a regular part of his journey, he was there to meet Jesus when he arrived.

Luke says Anna "came along" as Mary and Joseph presented Jesus in the temple. The temple was part of her journey, too.

If you want a more spiritually enriching Christmas, there are things you can do. One of the most important ones is to put your spiritual life on the road to see Jesus. Do your shopping and baking and traveling if you need to, that's fine – just don't expect to find Jesus in the stores or in your oven.

Go on family trips to the destinations of your choice. Great! Expect to have fun, to feel satisfied about the experience. But don't expect to find Jesus there unless you intentionally look for him along the way.

In the Christmas story nobody meets Jesus where they are. Even Mary, the mom, meets her son in a different place, Bethlehem. That's wasn't her home. We don't meet Jesus where we are either. We meet him where he is, and that's almost always out there, on the spiritual road. In worship. In a Bible study group. In a mission project like yesterday's red kettle event or next Saturday's caroling adventure. In intentional efforts on our part to find and connect with him.

Christmas is a journey, not to web sites or shopping malls, but to a savior who's waiting for you and me. What are you going to do this week to make your way from where you are to where he is?