

“Do You Need Christmas?”  
A Sermon Preached by Frank Mansell III  
John Knox Presbyterian Church – Indianapolis, Indiana  
Christmas Eve – December 24, 2014

**Luke 2: 1-20**  
**Isaiah 9: 2-7**

Do you need Christmas this year? That may seem like a silly question for a pastor to ask on Christmas Eve. And yet, amid all that surrounds our holiday preparations and activities in the month of December, I wonder sometimes if we stop and ask ourselves whether we truly need Christmas. It is not hard for our attention to drift toward our personal commitments and list of things to do, and our focus to drift away from what is truly happening on this hallowed of nights.

For example, why are you here tonight? Are you like me, and ever since you came into this world the church has been a part of your life? If you are, then you feel as if life would not be “right” if you were not here on this holy night. Christmas Eve would not be complete if you were not here with the community of faith to recall, remember, and give thanks for the birth story of God’s Son.

Are you here because it’s the next thing on the schedule for this busy holiday week? As we attempt to squeeze in one more party, one more shopping trip, one more item on the list, it can feel as if coming to church just falls into that line of “to do’s.” Perhaps you are here in body, but your mind is on what else needs to be done tonight to be ready for tomorrow. Perhaps you are here seeking some peace and stillness amid the busyness of the past several days and weeks.

Are you even sure why you are here? As you have wandered through the last week, the last month, the last year, you may be feeling lost, confused, or uncertain. As you struggle with a lost job, or grieve a loved one who is gone, or question what you are supposed to be doing in your life, you may be here in significant need. A need to be guided, a need to be comforted, a need to know there is a God, when all you have experienced is emptiness and pain.

Do you need Christmas this year? Does your life depend on it? How is God speaking to you this holy eve?

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“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined” (Isaiah 9:2).

I know I need Christmas this year. No, not all the expectations of decorating and baking and attending parties and the need to purchase that perfect gift. That’s not what I’m talking about. Tonight, I need, and

perhaps you need, what this night promises in Christmas: true peace, true joy, true love, true hope.

We are a people who have lived in a land of deep darkness. The violence and racial strife that our country is experiencing is not just in places like Ferguson, Missouri, or New York City. All we have to do is look around our own city, our own neighborhoods, our own schools, and realize that we still struggle mightily as God's children to live in harmony as people of differing skin tones, languages, ethnic and economic backgrounds. We have witnessed police officers killed, protests which have been both peaceful and violent, and the actions of a few smearing the integrity and reputation of the many.

I yearn for the Prince of Peace to arrive this night. I desperately long for his authority to grow continually, so that there shall be endless peace among God's people. I ache for this child to be born to us, so that righteousness and justice might come from this time and forevermore.

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"Do not be afraid; for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people" (Luke 2:10).

There is so much to fear in this world, if we allow ourselves to fall into that mindset. We can worry about loved ones whose health is deteriorating. We can worry about our children's future as they face important decisions. We can worry about our livelihood if our job security is threatened or uncertain. There is so much in this world to fear, if we allow ourselves to follow down that path.

Grief and loss can also cause fear and anxiety, whether it was a loss many years ago, or just a few days ago. Singing a certain carol, pulling out a specific decoration, sharing in a family tradition or activity - any of these can bring back memories which flood our hearts and minds with sadness and longing. My family will experience that next week, as there will literally be one-less seat at my parents' dining room table after the death of my uncle three weeks ago. It is not something that can be ignored; it is the hard reality of life and death; it is one of the results of loving others deeply.

I desperately need to hear this good news of great joy for all people. I long to be reassured that my fear and anxiety does not go unnoticed, and that this night God is truly with me, with you, with us. I yearn to be told once again that I am favored in the eyes of God - despite my sin, my imperfections, my wavering faith - for tonight of all nights, a Savior is born - for me, for you, for all of us.

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"Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us" (Luke 2:15).

It can be hard sometimes to still see God active in our lives. I will admit, even in my line of work, I can get so tunnel-visioned on what

needs to be done in my job, that I can forget to look around and see how God is moving, changing, and acting in my life and in the lives of those around me. Sound familiar? I'll even start questioning where God is and if God has forgotten about me and us.

And then, something like a heavenly host of angels makes an appearance to shake me out of my self-absorbed perspective. Last week, a woman stopped by the church with a carload of food. A ham, gallon of milk, bread, vegetables, canned goods, dessert – all the fixings for a Christmas meal. Lisa spoke with the woman and asked her what prompted her to stop by our church and offer this wonderful gift to someone in need. She replied, “One year ago, I was in great need, and I came here. This church gave me food and other assistance for me and my family. Now that I am in a better, stronger place, I wanted to pay it forward for someone else in need.” That woman was helped through our New Beginnings Program. And that meal she donated went to a family we adopted this December for Christmas.

I leap out of my routine and want to follow that star over Bethlehem tonight. I want to go with haste and see this thing that the Lord has made known to us. I want my faith reaffirmed that God is present, God is active, God is here – and then glorify and praise God for all I have seen and heard this holy night.

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Do you need Christmas this year? Does your life depend on it? How is God speaking to you this holy eve?

May our hearts be led once again to the love God brings in a manger stall. And may every day of our lives reflect our deep gratitude for what God has done for us this holy night.

Alleluia! Amen.