

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
Christmas Eve  
Luke 2  
December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014

Christmas is a time when memories are made. You perhaps can recall more vividly moments that have revolved around this time of year than any other portion in your life. The times you were in the Church Christmas program. The times with family and friends. You may recall what gifts you got – the ones you loved the most, the ones that made you all excited, the ones you may even still have. And then, I would imagine, there are gifts you received that you... well... did not love so much.

For me Christmas Eve included two things. First, our Children's Christmas Program, and then, a trip to Grandma's house to celebrate Christmas with my mother's side of the family. Now, I was a regular kid. I didn't love everything about going to Church. But I did love the Christmas program. My mother was always the program director and I always got the best parts. I loved the big parts – the parts that put me in front of the congregation so everyone could see how cute I was. Some say things haven't changed all that much for me – except the cute part. I loved the program and have great memories... but it would all change once the program was over.

You see, I loved the program, but, like a lot of kids, I didn't like dressing up in my cute little Christmas sweater. I was cute without the sweater – why do I need a sweater with snowflakes? And then, if that wasn't bad enough, I had to stay dressed up all the way through Christmas celebration at Grandma's house. I was often mortified by being in my good Church close because my cousin didn't have to dress up. Why did I have to dress up? As an adult all this seems silly. But to a nine year old kid, it meant everything.

Then one Christmas, it happened. It was too much to handle. Not only did I have my cute Christmas sweater on... again. Not only did my cousin get to go to Grandma's with whatever cool shirt he wanted to wear... again. But this time, he even got the best gift.

He got to open his gift from Grandma first. He always did. He was older than me. Grandma got him a really cool football jersey. Oh, it was nice. I loved it. I wanted it. But maybe Grandma got me one too. I looked at the present and it was the same size as my cousin's. This is it. I'm getting a cool football jersey just like my cousin. I tore into the wrapping paper. I opened the box and to my astonishment... it was a church shirt.

I'm sure my mother told my grandmother that I needed a church shirt. I probably did. Today I love getting church shirts. But the last thing a nine year old boy wants for Christmas is a church shirt... especially after his cousin got a cool football jersey. I couldn't contain my anger, my disappointment, and my rage. That probably wasn't my best Christmas. I probably didn't make it a good Christmas for grandma and mom and dad either.

It's amazing what we can remember about Christmas. And we will remember tonight to do all the usual things. We also remember how this night, in this place goes. We remember that Luke chapter 2 reading. We remember all the usual hymns and carols. We remember – and we are caused to remember – that is “reminded” that Mary and Joseph found no place to stay and had to “hunker down” in a cattle stall. The readings and our songs cause us to reflect once again on the declarations of those angels who told those shepherds there is someone worthy to be worshiped in the smallest and most insignificant of towns. Tonight is an amazing night filled

with memories of Christmases gone by – and most importantly – of the first Christmas, the birthday of our Savior Jesus.

Beloved in the Lord, a big part of Christmas for us today is remembering. And that remembering might not all be good. Whether it's bad memory of getting a church shirt from grandma as a kid, or, a memory of the way Christmas didn't work out the way you thought it would – the family didn't make it back, maybe the family wasn't getting along and was fragmented and that hurts, or maybe illness even death is what we remember the most. We see in these memories the effects of sin. These memories are not good. However, they remind us of why we so desperately need Christmas.

St. Paul said it best in the book of Galatians, "*When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons.*" The Father saw that the time had come and so Jesus would enter the world's stage. The stage was not brilliant. There was no, "decking of the halls." It was all very common – just like His earthly parents – just like the town He would be from – just like that first birthday celebration, there were more animals than people. And most importantly, just like you and me. In the days of our lives that are "not so" brilliant, our Lord reminds us that He has breached this world and our lives, not as a brilliant being or magnificently adorned King – but as common child with regular flesh and bones who needed everything we needed as a child – to be fed, to have His diaper changed – to be cradled in mothers arms.

So tonight, beloved in the Lord, remember what is the most important thing about what we celebrate right now. It's not about decorations and parties. It's not about church shirts or football jerseys. Beloved, it's not even about who is here and who is not here at this time of year. Yes, those are important things to us. Yes, those things fill our memories. But rather we take the element of what is the most important thing and are reminded most diligently of that tonight. What is it? It's love. It's this... *God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son so that we should not perish but have eternal life.* That's why angels sing and shepherds go running into town. Love is the reason why we have tonight. Because our Lord loves us more than we could ever begin to imagine.

Christmas is a time memories are made. And here is the best memory of all... God remembers you. The Psalmist says, "*He remembers His covenant forever.*" Not for a time, but for all time. He remembers what He did for you. He remembers His promise, "*Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you*" – even when times are troubling. The birthday of Jesus and His coming to us is a testament to that. God's memory is fortified and mercy is what He promises. You are a part of that. You are the reason for Christmas. You are the reason He comes. You are the reason He remembers how much He loves you. Thanks be to God and a blessed and Merry Christmas to you. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.