

# "Cleaning Up Christmas"

Matthew 2:13-23

December 26, 2010

Well, do you have it all cleaned up? Christmas is a bit of a mess, isn't it? All the hustle and bustle is enough to make most people a little irritable. And then there is all of the tradition of the season ... It is enough to make a person nuts. And then when Christmas Day is past and the wrapping paper is cleared away there is the inevitable internal conflict between the desire to keep the Christmas stuff up and enjoy it a bit longer and the desire to just get it all put away and be done ... Get back to normal.

It almost sounds like a good opener to talk about the need to keep Christmas in your heart all year long. But really it is a lead in to something much darker. It is a lead in to the question, 'don't you just hate Christmas?'

I suppose that such a question sounds a little dumb. It sounds as ridiculous as saying that you hate apple pie ... Or the flag ... Or love. But, seriously, consider the question. The Gospel text for today pictures the first and perhaps the greatest hater of Christmas. King Herod made nice when the wise men came to his door asking about the location of the birth of the baby that was born to be king. But he hated it. He hated Christmas so much that he would do the unthinkable to stop it. Innocent infants were put to death. But the plan of God could not be stopped.

Yes, shepherds and wise men were excited about celebrating the birth. But throughout the generations there have been the haters of Christmas. Ebenezer Scrooge hated it .... It was a sentimental waste of time when there was so much to do that would have been far more constructive. The Grinch tried to steal Christmas. Of course that was just a children's story but it seems as though every year there are more and more human 'grinches' that want to replace Christmas with something that would not have to be 'Christ focused'.

I suspect that we would all shake our heads in dismay at those who would try to eliminate Christmas. The story of Herod and the murder of the 'Holy Innocents' is enough to turn our stomachs even now after 20 centuries. It makes us sad to know those people that just don't get it like Scrooge. And we worry about ongoing cultural changes that sees a diminished acceptance of Christianity. But perhaps most importantly, do you hate Christmas? I am not asking if you hate the mess ... Or the stress ... Or all of the stuff that you now need to re-pack and put away? No, what I am asking is whether or not you are afraid of what it means to have the Christ child come.

For King Herod it was simple. If that child came and was going to be king .... Then he would not be king. And he would not have that. For many today, I believe the issue is the same. If Christ comes to be king than I can not be king. If Christ comes it will change your life ... And frankly, I like my life the way it is .... I don't want trees and ornaments and

decorations cluttering my life. If Christ comes it will change my world ..... But I don't want it to change.

And so we just live our lives without allowing the coming of a savior to change us. I thought about this when I read a couple of stories that were related to the Christmas season. One story told about a person who had \$1,600 in gold coins in a Salvation Army kettle on Christmas. The person placed the gift there quietly and anonymously. It would seem to be exactly the kind of story that we want to hear to demonstrate the spirit of compassion that Christmas brings into the lives of people. Unfortunately there was a follow up story. After having received the gift, the local Salvation Army office began getting phone calls about the gold coins. The coins were stolen. The thief had dropped them in the kettle to get rid of them obviously thinking that he would be caught with them. Do we really want the Christ of Christmas to come and change our lives?

And then there was the story of the man who was driving home from work on Christmas Eve. As he was driving by a lake on his route he witnessed a young boy fall through the ice on the lake. Taking matters into his own hands and risking his own life, the man stopped his car, jumped out, tore off his jacket and crawled out onto the ice. He managed somehow to save the drowning boy and they both made it safely back to the shore. It is one of those great happy ending that make perfect Christmas examples of the love and sacrifice of the season. Unfortunately the story goes on to tell that the man discovered that while he was risking his life saving the boy, somebody in the crowd of onlookers stole his jacket and with it, the envelope containing his Christmas bonus from work. Don't you just love Christmas. The beauty of the season is unparalleled. But the coming of Christ calls us to do more than play 'coochie coochie, coo with a little baby. It really does call us into a world that has been changed. Christ will be king and not me ... not you. Christ will be the savior and not me ... not you. So what do you think? Do you hate Christmas and wish it was just a messy holiday that we can put away and be done with so that we can get back to sitting on our throne?

One quote I read was from a Presbyterian Pastor named Walton who said, "Nothing is as over as Christmas when it's over. The empty boxes, the pretty paper on the floor, the stray tinsel from the tree with which the cat has played and left abandoned on the sofa, the empty cartons of eggnog stuffed into the trash bag. Life has come back to normal, whatever that is, and it means that the diversion of the past few weeks, the frenzy and fuss, the lights and glitter are packed away once again like the star at the top of the tree; taken down and carefully wrapped, padded and protected in its ample box. And what is left? A war in Iraq [and Afghanistan], homeless people sleeping in door stoops, hungry people begging for food, worries about health, kids that concern us, jobs that wear us down. We're back to where we left off before the holidays . . ."

I pray that such is not the case this year. Instead of hating Christmas and any inconvenience that the Savior's coming may have caused let us embrace it and allow our lives to be transformed. Not because we love the tree dropping leaves all over the living room carpet or because the gifts from relatives or friends moved us to alter our lives. We are transformed because our God has come yet again to save us.

**The Prophet Isaiah uses these words that begin our first lesson for today. "I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord ....." As we seek to hang on to the Savior who has come to us we do so know that God has never abandoned His people. Christmas is what God does for us out of love. In the midst of any darkness we encounter, God comes again ..... he provides, strengthens, guides and saves. Don't clean up Christmas too fast. Recount again how God has come to save you.**

**AMEN**