

"Simple Christmas"
December 18, 2022 | Pastor Cordel Robinson

Well, hey everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek Church. Before we get started, let's just welcome all of our campuses - Gainesville, Lewisville, Denton, Flower Mound, Online. We are so glad you are here with us today. Hey, did you know, Christmas is just a week away? I've got to ask you, are you ready? Are you ready to usher in the awe and wonder of Christmas? You see, typically, when you ask a question like that, you get divided into two different groups. Either you're the group of pure delight, or you're the group of pure dread.

If you're in the delight camp, it's like "Bring out the tinsels, I love the ornaments and the cookies, the festivities!" You love everything yuletide. But if you're in the camp of dread, it's like, "Bring out the Tums, please. Because there's so much to do and so little time. How am I going to survive all of the swirl?" But here's the reality. No matter which camp you're in, with the commercialization of Christmas, we all face a real danger. We all face a danger of missing the real message of Christmas. With all of the swirl, somehow the substance gets lost. I'd like to invite you with me to change all that. Here's my invitation.

Let's simplify Christmas. Can we? Let's get unhurried, and uncluttered, and unfrazzled. Let's return our focus and our attention back on Jesus, and just remember why He came in the first place. This is what I have for you today. Five simple Christmas truths. Just to help us restore the awe and wonder of Christmas. Are you up for that? Okay, the first one is this - Jesus came in the flesh. You see, the story of Christmas does not begin with that familiar, "Once upon a time..." See, that's the way we begin feel-good, make-believe stories or classic mythology. But that doesn't fit Jesus, because He is neither myth nor make believe.

Jesus is real. Look at how John 1:14 puts it. "The Word," the expression of God, the billboard of God, if you will, "became flesh and made his dwelling among us." You see, Jesus wanted to walk a mile in our shoes. He wanted to understand what it's like to be human. He took on our legs and our lungs, our skin and our skeleton. He took on our hearts and our heartaches, because He wanted to live fully as a human. Think about it. The God who slung a hundred million stars into the galaxies became a helpless baby, in common feeding trough.

The God who roared became the God who wailed. I find it so interesting that our little ones, our children, get this story for what it is - plain, simple truth. But we adults mystify it, sometimes we treat it more as fiction than as fact. A group of school-aged children were invited by their teacher to reenact the nativity scene. They came in their old bathrobes, you remember the scene. They showed up, and the teacher asked them a question. "Does anyone here remember what gifts the wisemen brought?" They sort of looked at each other dumbfounded. Then, one girl raised her hand, "Oh, I remember. I remember. I think they brought 'Frankie-sence.' I think it's like an after-shave!"

Well, just ignore the fact that Jesus wasn't shaving yet, but the point is our kids get it. Let's not mystify what the Scriptures affirm is real. Then, we have to ask the question, well, why did Jesus become human in the first place? I believe it's because He wanted to show us how we could

live lives fully alive. See, that's why He became a baby, and then a toddler, and then a teenager. Picture that, Jesus as a teenager, or a young adult, or even a carpenter's apprentice, why? Because He wanted to be fully familiar with what it's like to be human.

But then, He had to take on the two things that most limit us from being human. Look at Hebrews 2:14, "Because God's children are human beings," would you agree with that, "- made of flesh and blood - the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could He die." That's what Jesus had to do, to conquer those limits in our life. Look at what he conquered, "And only by dying could He break the power of the devil, the power of death." The two things that most limit us and look at what Jesus did. Boom! The power of death, gone! Boom! The power of the devil, gone! So we could live lives that are fully alive.

I've got to ask you, do you believe that that story is real? That it's not make-believe, and that it's not myth? That's our first Christmas truth. The second Christmas truth is that Jesus came at just the right time. Did you know that Jesus did not come a day early or a day late? He didn't come by accident. His birth was not arbitrary at all. In fact, Paul puts it this way in Galatians 4:4, "But when the right time came," notice the right time is the time God decided on, "He sent His Son born of a woman, born as a Jew." When the right time came; it was like there's this humongous hourglass in heaven.

You remember the kind where this sand just drizzles down through the neck. For centuries, for decades, for years, the chorus of heaven, just watched the sand dunes drizzle through and they look to the Father and say, "Is it time? Is it time?" No, not until that last particle of sand fell through, and they looked to the Father, He gave the thumbs up. Because it was where kairos remember, and chronos collided, it was the right season. It was the right day of the calendar, and guess what, Jesus was born. Luke adds his perspective. "While they," Mary and Joseph, "were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn son." It wasn't just the end of Mary's pregnancy.

No, this was the beginning of the most significant event in human history. The time had come. You see, it was the time I believe where all of the dominoes fully aligned to prepare for Jesus' coming. All of the political, all of the social, all of the cultural dominoes were perfectly aligned. Let me give you one example. Did you know that a hundred years before Jesus was born, that letter writing was very rare. It was reserved for kings, military leaders, and scribes. The reason is because they only had three different kinds of writing media. They had metal, they had animal skin, or they had clay - none of which were easy to use.

Picture this - a son wants to write a letter to his mom. He picks up a piece of metal. "Dear mom..." No wonder moms never get letters from their sons. But you see, that all changed just years before Jesus came. Why? Because God had the Egyptians learn how to mass produce paper from a plant called Papyrus. This is fascinating. Papyrus is a reed-like plant that grew prolifically on the banks of the Nile. The Egyptians figured out you can take it, you can slice it

very thinly, you can put it in a crisscross pattern, you roll it out with the stone, you dry it in the sun, you pleat them together, and voila, paper scrolls.

Here's what's unique about it. It became both accessible and affordable to the common individual. Now, why do I care about that? Did you know that the New Testament, 27 Books, was written by seven men; all of which were not kings, were not scribes, were not military. They were carpenters. They were fishermen. They were tax collectors who had access to paper. Why is that important? So they could record the most significant event in human history. These letters make up the New Testament today.

Was that coincidence? I don't think so. You see, it was the time God decided on. It was just the right time. Let me ask you, are you grateful for God's timing? Are you grateful for not only His timing with Jesus, but His timing, with the dominoes in your life? Number three, Jesus came to make the invisible God visible. It probably won't shock you to know that the Scriptures tell us that God is invisible. Look at 1 Timothy 1, "Now to the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever." You notice He's invisible. Why? Because He's spirit.

It's hard to get our arms around spirit. In the Old Testament, those who spoke for God, those who are close to God, got glimpses of what God was like. It was like they got a preview, a trailer to a movie, if you will. It was just a shadow, but not the real thing. Until Jesus came, and Jesus gave a color image of what they had had before. It was like in the Old Testament, remember the family album that had those black and white Polaroids, that's what they got. But, then, in the New Testament, when Jesus came, they got 4K, HD, 3D, 1080p, L-M-N-O-P. I have no idea what I'm talking about, but you get the point.

In the Old Testament, God was distant, unseen, mysterious, but then Jesus came, and He made the invisible God visible. Let me show you how He did this. I love this. It says, "No one has ever seen God." That's true. He's invisible. "But the unique one," that's Jesus, the begotten one, the beloved Son, "who is Himself God is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us." That word 'reveal' means to tell a story. But Jesus came for show and tell. He came to show and tell us what the Father was like. Jesus was credentialed to do so, why? Because He had lived for eternity near the Father's heart.

It's interesting; in the original, the word 'heart' is not used. It's literally the chest area of God, the area between the armpits. No, don't think that God has armpits, but get the drift. It's a word picture. What is the chest? The chest is the place of intimacy. It's the place where you hold your loved ones close to show your tender affection for them. That's where Jesus lived for eternity. Jesus came from heaven to show us up close and personal what that Father's heart was like. Let me ask you, in this season, are you connected to the Father's heart? Do you feel His tender compassion for you?

Because that's what He came to reveal. If you're not feeling that, receive this. This is our prayer for you, especially during this week. It comes directly from Paul's prayer to the Church at Thessalonica. "May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance." It's like he's saying, may God direct your heart directly to the Father, heart of God. May you not pass go, don't collect \$200; a straight path from your heart to the tender embrace of your heavenly Father. That's our prayer for you. By the way, did you notice, "May the Lord direct your heart also to Christ's perseverance," why? Because Jesus pulled out all the stops so you could experience the love of God.

He held nothing back. He finished His race, so that we could be loved in such a tangible way. Let me ask you, are you beginning to feel the awe and wonder of Christmas? It's coming back, isn't it? But wait, we're not done. Jesus came to bring light to our darkness. Do you notice, they're more lights up than ever before? If you drive down my street, it's like, oh, my goodness, there are lights everywhere. Why? Because America is obsessed with lights at Christmastime. In fact, I Googled this week, "How many light sets do Americans buy in the month of December?"

150 million sets of lights. Can you believe it? That represents 6% of our power grid. Oh, my goodness. We love our lights. But I fear that we've forgotten the reason for the lights in the first place. You see it all points back, John 1:9, to the true light. "The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world." 'The true light,' that implies that every other light is a wannabe light. It's a false light. Only Jesus is the true light. Because Jesus is your light source. Jesus is your light supplier. Jesus is your light sustainer. No one else will do.

Why did He come? He came to eradicate darkness. "I" Jesus says, "am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." For instance, is that not a great promise that those of us who are walking with Jesus and following Him, we never have to follow in darkness. We never have to walk in darkness. Does that mean dark things won't happen? No. It means we don't have to walk with them, because we have the light of life with us. You see, darkness is everywhere in the world today. You can hardly turn on the news without seeing some expression of darkness, and no amount of intellect or ingenuity can flip the switch to turn the darkness off.

In fact, if we think that we and our humanity can take care of the darkness problem, we're missing the message of Christmas. This is why 700 years before Jesus was born, Isaiah predicted this - "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned." Let me ask you, do you ever feel like your zip code is the land of deep darkness? We all experienced darkness, don't we? Feeling far from God or friction in relationships? Or just that dark cloud that hangs over us. It could be finances. It could be health issues. We all experience darkness.

But did you realize, a light has dawned? His name is Jesus. The switch has been flipped in Jesus' name. Let me ask you, can you trust Jesus for the darkness in your life? Where are we so far? We've looked at four different Christmas truths. Jesus came in the flesh, at just the right time, to make the invisible God visible, and to bring light to our darkness. Now last, but certainly not least, Jesus came to bring good news, not good advice. Don't you love that Christmas story; that remarkable story where the angels chose the most unlikely audience to announce the birth of Jesus.

You would expect, because it's such a big deal, for the announcement to come to kings, to come to the powers that be, to come to the religious leaders. But no, God in His sovereignty chose, what? Shepherds; shepherds to bring the news to. It wasn't even the varsity shepherds. This was like the B-team night shepherds. Notice what it says, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people." Why does it have that phrase, 'all of the people'? Because people, like shepherds, are often overlooked, forgotten, and hidden.

The point was 'to all people,' including you, shepherds, including us. "Today in the town of David," Bethlehem, "a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord." Do you notice that the angels came to bring good news, not good advice. There's a difference between the two. You see, advice is about what needs to be done. News is about what's already been done. Advice urges us to make things happen. News urges us to accept that something has already happened that will affect our future forever. You see, this is what separates true Christianity from every other world religion. Think about it.

Religion is all about self-improvement. It's all about giving advice. "Well, if I were you, I'd do this because God's not happy with you." That's advice. It requires effort. It requires straining. But that's not true Christianity. True Christianity is, "the Savior has been born, and it should cause great joy for all of the people." That's true Christianity. See, Jesus broke into history to do for us, what we could not do for ourselves. Nobody can be their own savior. It requires a savior to break in, and to do not through self-improvement, but through His finished work. That's what the message was.

To put it in the simplest of terms. See if you can catch this. The Son of God became a man so that mankind could become a son of God. The Son of God became a man, a man and a woman, so that men and women everywhere could become beloved sons and daughters of God. The only thing we are asked to do is simply receive it. Look at John 1:12, "Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name," receive and believe are the same thing. It doesn't mean to just give intellectual assent. It means to trust it for your life, to rest in it, to believe in Jesus' character, and what He came to do. When you and I do that, "He gave the right to become children of God."

That's where we become His forever children, because that's how much He loves us. Friends, that is the gospel. The gospel is where God wants to restore our identity, reconcile our

relationship with Him, and renew the purpose for which we were originally created. That is good news and not good advice. There you have it. Five simple Christmas truths. Let's look - Jesus came in the flesh. He wasn't myth. He wasn't make-believe. He came at just the right time, so that all of the dominoes were aligned.

He came to make the invisible God visible, so that we could connect to the heart of God. He came to bring light to our darkness, no matter how gloomy things are. He came to bring His light because He's the only true light. He came to bring good news, not good advice. That is pure, uncluttered, unhurried, unfrazzled Christmas. Wouldn't you agree? The question remains, how can we bring this truth into the crazy week that we're all going to face? My to-do list is this long. Well, let me give you a suggestion. I think Mary was a good model for us. Do you remember, in the story, the angels came and reported, "You're going to have a baby, and his name is Jesus, and he's going to save the world."

"What?" So, what did she do? It says, she treasured these things, and pondered them in her heart. This is my suggestion. Treasure this treasure for yourself. You say, "Well, how?" By pondering. What does it mean to ponder? It means to reflect, to think, to just give God space to help you process. I've pulled all of our questions forward and put them in the first-person. I encourage you, use these questions to reflect on these truths this week. First of all: Do I believe Jesus is real? I mean, do I really believe like a child, with childlike faith, that Jesus really did come to Earth?

Secondly: Am I grateful for God's time? Not only in Jesus' life, but can I trust them for the dominoes in my life? Third: Am I really connected to the Father's heart or is there a meandering path that eventually gets there? No, He wants a direct path so that you can feel His tender embrace. Fourth: Can I trust Jesus' light to overcome my darkness? Finally: Where am I receiving the world's advice instead of resting in God's good news? I encourage you, take those questions, ponder them today, this week. Let's usher in the wonder and awe of Christmas.

Once again, this is not a treasure to be hoarded. We learned last week that we are responsible to give what we have received. You receive your card, your invitation card; I encourage you, think of the person who needs this simple aspect, this truth of Christmas. Who can you invite? Let's be the culture that God has called us to be. That's Christmas simplified, unhurried, uncluttered, and unfrazzled. I don't know where you are today. You may be in that camp where you can't wait for Christmas, bring on the tinsel. Or you may be in the camp of dread. Pass me the Tums.

Wherever it is, would you just take a deep breath? Just take in these simple truths, because they're truths for you and they're truths for me. Let's just refocus on Jesus. That He really did come in the flesh, He really did come right on time, He came to connect us to the Father's heart, He came to turn the lights back on, and He came to bring good news, which is great joy

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for all people. That, friends, is the awe and the wonder of Christmas. Will you bow your head, close your eyes - let me ask you, what's the Holy Spirit saying to you?

How is the God of the universe speaking to you right now? What's He asking you to do? Have you gotten caught up in this world of Christmas and perhaps missed the substance? Well, just take a deep breath. Just soak in all of these simple Christmas truths and let that just rest deeply in your heart this week. That's what He wants for you. Father, as we think about this story, I can't help but just think this whole story is a declaration of Your goodness, so we're so grateful for that. Thank you, Father, that You've been good to us in the past. We know You're going to be good to us in the future, but Father, would You just be good to us this week?

Would you show us the real Jesus who came, and why He came? Father, in Jesus' name, we ask that You restore in our hearts the awe and the wonder of Christmas. We pray all of this in Jesus' matchless name. Amen.