

Sermon – Christmas Day 2022

Unwrap the Package

Let us pray

I love this time of year. I love Christmas. It is a time of genuine joy and love. We have 5 grand-children and they certainly have been keenly anticipating this Christmas morning and unwrapping some packages.

It's all joy, happiness and wonder!

OR IS IT!?

Not everyone is of the same opinion. I read an article about Christmas, and it unwrapped a different package.

Let's unwrap that package

The article suggested that in this time of goodwill and celebration there is actually an increase in the number of

- domestic and family arguments at Christmas.
- and it is NOT a time of hope, peace, joy and love, but a time of increased tension and 'fights!'
- Hmmmm!!!!
- I wondered about that?!

So, I did a bit of research and was surprised to find some confirmation of this thesis.

The stats suggest the Christmas Package looks a bit like this in our culture

- there is an increase in family rows, in many places
- there is an increase in tragedy on the roads
- there is blatant commercial exploration of the season, and

- there is increased alcoholic consumption resulting in increased loutish behavior!

***** hmmm, as I look around, some of you seem a little bewildered, maybe thinking, ‘hang on Ron, this is not in the spirit of Christmas, not what I expected from a Christmas day reflection!’ ‘That’s not my family!’*****

Fair enough!

So, perhaps, we will leave that package wrapped for the moment – maybe come back to it in a little while.

Let me unpack another package for you – its content is strange!

When we unpack this package, it reveals an unhealthy romanticizing of the birth of Jesus. (repeat)

The picture we normally expect of his birth, that has been espoused over many centuries, can be summed up as follows:
SWEET BABY JESUS. SWEET BABY JESUS IN THE LOVELY MANGER!

Baby Jesus, born in a spotless beautiful crib or bassinet – surrounded by folk all dressed up – clean, awe-struck animals in attendance, halo like light surrounding his head – with all parties smiling! And so on and so forth!

Frankly, this scene is one that couldn’t be any further from the likely truth of Jesus’ actual birth, than the Christmas ugliness I referred to earlier, represents Christmas.

You see, you won’t find such a romanticized view in the Christmas package, if you truly look closely. Such a culturally contrived compendium of Jesus, the Babe in the Manger, corrupts the authentic Christ child package, just as much as family fights and feuds, despoil the very heart of Christmas!

SOOOOOOOO - Let's think about how this Christ child was REALLY born – the real surprise package!

- By any standards, and especially by the standards of his time, Jesus was illegitimate – he was a bastard child – not a good look back then.
- He was born in appallingly abject conditions: cold, dark, stinking and highly unpleasant.
- Jesus' parents were 'nothings' in their culture. They were poor and could not even afford the most basic amenities for his birth.
- The Shepherds who came to see him were crooks; the dregs of society who came, not so much, full of wonder, as scared and bewildered, wondering how they could turn this weird event to their own advantage.

This is the real Jesus, Babe in the Manger, Christmas Package.

Not one about the special, the select, the fashionable, the cute, nor indeed, is it about the abnormal, corrupt and distorted view I shared earlier, associated with the Christmas event.

Neither of these polar opposites tell us about the heart of the baby Jesus package.

So, what is at the heart of 'the REAL Package?'

The HEART and the TRUTH of the Christ Package is that a very real, decidedly normal, and totally human child enters a very real, unsettlingly normal, and very human world. He comes into our midst, not as an OTHER – but fully, completely, and utterly as ONE OF US. Emmanuel!

Christianity lives or falls on this truth

Of course, He is the Son of God, the Christ, the Messiah, the Saviour, but as Christians we affirm, in faith, what our rational brains will not let us affirm, namely, that this Saviour of the world is at once, both Son of God and Son of Man! That is, that baby borne in the food trough in Bethlehem 2000 years ago was and is TRULY 100% human.

So, baby Jesus enters the real world – the real world of human fights, the real world of plunder and war and rape and destruction (AND the real world of beauty and co-operation and compassion and working-it-all-out together.) AND the world of self-righteousness and pride, which seeks to manipulate the Babe into their own human controlled packages.

NO! The Jesus in the Christmas package IS the world's true destiny AND helps us to unpack our and the world's true destiny – true humanity.

But, nor is he a baby Harry Potter who waves his magic wand to rid the world of its many evil Voldermorts.

As he grows this child Jesus will mature into the fullness of humanity, where he stands in the midst of the many forces of evil and good in our world. He challenges them all, and all of us, with his love, so as, to prompt us all to realize and appreciate our true fullness of humanity.

He loves his sisters and brothers, even when they have nothing but hate for him, for others, for the world, and for themselves. He never stops loving, even those who couldn't 'give a toss' about him.

He also proclaims a gospel of undeserved gracious love and life, in the midst of all our self-righteousness, which proclaims a gospel of human achievement and pride, devoid of 'walking humbly with our God.'

Eventually he will die, young, because of his determined unwillingness to ever give up on that love, which is the very centre of his humanity and of our humanity, too. Out of that self-giving love, he seeks and desires nothing but love and wholeness for ALL and in ALL. He will even die for it.

No corrupt and destructive Christmas here, in the manger, nor a sloppy and romanticized, sweet baby Jesus, in the manger.

Rather:

- Jesus the babe was born, so that families (and nations and the whole world) might be reconciled in and through his love, rather than destroy each other with hate, violence, self-righteousness, pride and apathy.
- Jesus the babe, was born in poverty, in an animal shelter out the back, so that the poor and the hungry and the homeless might be no more.
- Jesus the babe was visited by wise and rich men who brought him expensive gifts, so that all of us who are rich (and wise!) might share and give generously so that all are able to have what they need.
- Jesus the babe, was borne in humble surrounds, so that he might challenge the self-sufficient pride and self-righteousness of humanity, and turn our prideful, and acquisitive ways to ways of humility, joy, peace, generosity and love.
- Jesus the babe, was born in simplicity so that we might all learn to live simply and sustainably in our home, mother earth.

Don't be trapped, year-long, by the trappings, corruptions or distractions of Christmas Day, rather let the 'real package' of the baby Jesus, invade and transform ALL of your daily living, always.

That's the real deal: the real package!

Have a great year unwrapping it!

Amen

Let us pray

Baby Jesus, in all our living, including our dying, fill us with your love every day, so that your Kingdom, may indeed come on earth, as it is in Heaven.

We pray in Jesus' name **Amen**