

Pastor Bill's Ramblings

John 1:1-3 & 14 NKJV

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.



GRACE and peace in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

In December we come to the end of our secular calendar, but to the beginning of our Christian calendar. Advent, which began Nov. 27, is the beginning of our Christian year. So, for the next month we will celebrate the beginning and the end. I hope that is not prophetic.

I have heard a statement a number of times and it is one that makes me stop and think when I hear it. "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." This has been thrown out when discussing business models and even when church growth has been discussed. I lately have been mulling this over when it comes to our "TRADITIONS," including our Christmas traditions. Now do not get me wrong, I love tradition. Each year, I look forward to Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years. Although I will say that things just do not seem to be the same as they were when I was in high school. [I guess those times were more fun when we did not have as much responsibility, but that is another story.] Yet sometimes traditions can overshadow what was intended in the first place.

Take for instance the story of a young lady who was preparing her first roast and as she did, she cut about an inch or so off the end of the roast. Her husband asked her why she did that and she said "Because my mother

H always did that." So the next time she saw her mother she asked her why she cut the end off the roast before putting it in the oven. She said, "Because my mother always did." So they went and asked grandma why she cut the end of the roast and of course she said "Because my mother always did." Well, great grandma happened to still be alive so the next time grandma and granddaughter went to the nursing home they asked her why she cut the end off of her roast, to which great-great grandma replied, "Because it would not fit in our little oven otherwise."

We get so wrapped up in our traditions that many times, like the young wife above, we blindly continue or expand upon our traditions for the experience and the pleasure it may bring, but forget about the reason the tradition began. Early in our Christian tradition the idea of Christmas was not even on the radar. The Christian faith placed most of it's emphasis on bringing the Good News to others and celebrating Resurrection Sunday or what we refer to as Easter. It was not until the Christian religion was widely accepted in Rome that the idea of Christmas entered into the picture.

As the church started to cement it's liturgical calendar and Christmas was celebrated, we find that the church began the Christian New Year with a time of Advent, a time of preparation, not only to remember the birth of Jesus, but also a time of preparation for Jesus' coming again or as spoken in theological circles, Jesus' Second Coming. We remember Israel's waiting for their Messiah. We see that the writings of the Old Testament end almost 400 years before Jesus' birth. Those who held to their faith knew that one day the Messiah, the Christ would come. We likewise wait for His coming again.

I have stated in the past that Christmas was not celebrated until December 24th. As you read the old stories you will find that most Christmas trees were actually put up on Christmas eve and the "Twelve Days of Christmas" were celebrated until January 5th, with January 6th being Epiphany. Epiphany literally means a manifestation of a divine being. Epiphany in the Christian church is the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, as represented by the Magi in Matthew 2:1-12.

The tradition I so dearly remember, is that we started celebrating Christmas the Friday after Thanksgiving Day and not a day before. (over)

Friday morning my father, brother and I would get up in the attic and bring down what seemed like 20 plus boxes of ornaments and decorations. Then the six of us, that includes my mom and two sisters, would decorate through the weekend until all was complete. I also recall that we would put on the local radio station which began to play Christmas songs on that Friday. Things would calm down, at least for me, until Christmas. I usually went Christmas shopping on December 23rd or 24th because there was not much left to choose from which made my decision making a whole lot easier. Of course we went to church on Christmas Eve and then we would wait until everyone was up on Christmas morning and open gifts.

Some of you may recall from previous messages that I do not like to wait. I have to work at being patient. Kimberly will tell you of a time I waited in a doctor's office for close to an hour and got up and left saying I would never come back to this doctor again, Unfortunately it was the only such doctor in Springfield OH and I had to eat a few words and go back. This even goes back to my childhood days. We lived in Atlanta GA and somewhere between 1st and 3rd grade I woke up about 3 o'clock a.m. one Christmas morning. I checked on the tree and there were packages underneath it. I figured there is no time like the present, so I proceeded to open all mine. Needless to say my parents were not very happy with me and became even more upset when I kept trying to open my siblings' presents, since I had nothing to open. But like all of you, I have truly fond memories of tradition, but I see that my traditions are anchored in the secular world. Madison 5th Ave. has pushed the idea of Christmas being celebrated early. I believe that Hallmark begins selling Christmas ornaments in July. And of course we all know about Black Friday, which is a term that originated in Philadelphia in about 1966. Interestingly, it began to become known outside of the Philadelphia area around 1975, which is why I do not remember Black Friday as a youth, being that I graduated from high school in 1976. The term's spread was gradual, however, and in 1985 the Philadelphia Inquirer reported that retailers in Cincinnati and Los Angeles were still unaware of the term. Yet today, every one is aware of Black Friday and I know people who religiously plan out that day.

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All this to say that for people who like "tradition" we have allowed the secular world to greatly alter our faith tradition. And getting wrapped up in the secular tradition along with the idea of Santa Claus, reindeer and elves we have lost the true reason for the season. I know all of you will tell me that it is the time we celebrate Jesus' birth but to many of us we are just paying our faith "lip service." If we truly believed that we have received a glorious, wonderful, holy gift from heaven, if we truly know that through Jesus' death and resurrection we have received forgiveness of our sin and we have secured a place eternal with God, then we should pay our faith more than "lip service." Folks, you and I have received a gift that far outshines any other gift we have ever received and I would dare say outshines the gift of life on earth itself. Watch a young child this Christmas, when they receive a wonderful gift they get excited and cannot wait to tell everyone about it, even days after Christmas. It is interesting that Jesus said, as recorded in both Mark and Luke, Mark "15 Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." Can this include a reference to the fact that we should accept the gift and share the gift as a child would. We should do no less with the gift we have received through Jesus.

I do pray that each one of you and your families have a very blessed Christmas. May you once again, with the heart of a child, open the gift anew. May you know and accept the forgiveness of sins this gift imparts. May you live into the gift of resurrection and eternal life that this gift promises. May you once again, with the joy and excitement of a child, share the gift of Jesus Christ with all those around you, yes in words, but more importantly in the way you live your lives and share God's love. May the true Spirit of Christmas invade and indwell your lives each and every day.

From my family to you—Have a truly Merry Christmas!!!!
Your Servants in Christ,
*Pastor Bill, Kimberly, William, Wendy, Josh, Sarah, Caleb,
David, Sadie & Xavier*

Pastor Bill and Family