

The title for today's message is: **"Life Without Christmas"**

The angel said: **"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel"**

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I begin this message with a question? How did Christmas become so complicated?

Some stores won't allow the Salvation Army to collect donations to help them meet the great needs of the poor and down trodden.

Other stores refuse to allow their employees to even speak the words, "Merry Christmas".

That's right, It has and is still is politically incorrect in a pluralistic culture to wish you a "Merry Christmas".

Lowe's Home Improvement Stores did finally take down their "Holiday Tree" banner and put up "Christmas Tree" banners.

I guess the sales were not going so well for "holiday trees". Even the U.S. Capitol "holiday tree" was restored to the "Capitol Christmas Tree".

We know these stories are not making the change to honor the birth of God's Son, Jesus Christ. No! It's about business.

Several years ago, John Leo, who writes editorial pieces for U.S. News and World Report.

Now, Leo wrote the following comment about our culture and the season of Christmas.

Like other's before him, He wrote, Joseph went up from Galilee to Bethlehem with Mary, his espoused wife, who was with child.

Now while there, Mary gave birth to a little baby boy. Her 1st born son, she wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger.

Only because as they entered the town of Bethlehem they found no room in the inn. Can you imagen, the Son of God had no place to be born.

But not to worry, an angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds and said: "I bring you good tidings of great joy. Unto you is born a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

Now a Pharisee who happened to be walking by said; "Joseph, there's a problem with the angel, and where Jesus is to be born.

You see the Angels are widely regarded as religious symbols and the stable where Jesus was to be born is on public property.

The Pharisee must have thought this whole thing, you know the stable, manger and the animals looks to him like a Nativity scene. That's a no no."

Joseph responded: "What should I do? What if I added a couple of reindeer near the ox and ass and maybe a candy cane or a snowman?" "That would help" said the Pharisee.

Joseph also said; No court can resist that. Right?" Mary then spoke out and asked: "What does my son's birth have to do with snowmen?"

A calm voice said, "Be of good cheer Mary, you have done well and your son will change the world." "At last, a sane person," Mary thought.

She turned to see a radiant and confident female face. The woman spoke again. "There is one thing though.

Religious holidays are important but we must learn to celebrate them in ways that unite, not divide and to know the true reason for the season.

For instance, instead of “season’s greetings.” Why not just Merry Christmas, Joy to the world.

But instead we see pictures in bulletins and in news print showing that the secular culture never really wanted the simple manger scene.

There was a picture from Christianity Today early 90’s which shows a manger scene under a Christmas tree.

But with each frame...more and more gifts eventually hide the manger scene from view.

Sadly today Christmas has become the test of a big box retailer’s 4th quarter financials.

On line purchasing at “Overstocked.com” and center mall displays by Hickory Farms depend on the Christmas season for profit.

The funny thing is, if there were no Christmas, merchants all over the world would invent it. Yet for many, they believe Christmas was invented.

And because of that belief Christians will proclaim “ba humbug” to political correctness in a secular culture singing traditional Christmas hymns.

Look, as God’s people we come together to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

But Christmas means more than just the birth of a baby. Christmas is when God chose to enter the world He created in the flesh. A miracle we call the “Incarnation”.

The Incarnation is the ultimate and final disclosure of the eternal God. It tells us who God is, what God is like and what God wants.

The Incarnation is the self realization of the Absolute being Himself, yes, the pre-existent Son of God, talking in human form.

The Apostle Paul writes: “God was pleased to have all of his full deity dwell in (Christ) him, and through him reconcile to himself all things.

Another words by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.” so Christmas is about God’s gift of ultimate hope and love for the human race.

Not about the merchant’s gifts under the holiday tree that hides the manger with Mary and Joseph.

The angel told Joseph that the child born to Mary was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

And that He would be called, “Immanuel, which means “God with us.” The eternal God who created the heavens and earth.

Yet now resides in a cradle of wood from a tree He created. Jesus totally and completely experienced humanity with all its’ self limitations, sorrow, suffering and death.

Jesus in his humanity was tested and tempted by the devil himself, yet Jesus was without sin.

So the secular culture doesn’t want the “incarnation”. Emmanuel God with us, does not sell computer games, or cologne.

Society wants the cute stuff, fluffy sheep, cows, the infant Jesus, as long as He remains an infant, stars and St. Nicholas, reindeer and fir trees.

No doubt the market place will retain the pagan stuff, even if they dye the trees powder blue and decorate them with miniature Disney ornaments.

The market place will also retain some of the traditional melodies, but in upbeat arrangements that remove them from the realm of traditional worship.

Ancient chants are popular, they sound religious and best of all, no body understands Latin, so no shoppers are offended.

Martin Luther explained the Incarnation this way: *“O Lord, you have created all, how did you come to be so small, to sweetly sleep in manger bed, where lowly cattle lately fed?”*

“True Christianity does not begin at the top, as do all other religions do, it begins at the bottom.

You must run to the manger, and the mother’s womb, embrace this holy child in your arms.”

When God became one of us in the person of Jesus, He did not cease being God.

The Incarnation mystery sets the Christmas message apart from all religions that have ever existed.

Jesus the eternal One, humbled himself and entered our human existence with flesh and blood, yet remained divine. This mystery, I can't explain but I accept.

Our reason cannot succeed in trying to understand how God could possibly have loved us to such a degree.

So much that he would allow the fate of the world to rest on the response of the small town town...

How many times Mary must have gone over the angel's words as she felt the Son of God kicking within her being.

How many time must Joseph have second guessed his own encounter with the angel, like Mary, just a dream?

As they both endured the gossip among neighbors who could plainly see the changing shape of the woman he was to marry.

God in a manger, such a thing baffles the intellect. It's so much easier to hide the small wooden stable with Mary and Joseph, behind the bright packages under the 'holiday tree'.

What would our world be like if God had not come to Bethlehem through the womb of Mary?

This past week, Disney Studios released a new movie; "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe".

Now, the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe is all about Christmas, that's right you heard me. Well that is true.

That is based on the book by C.S. Lewis, with the same title. It is about a cold land, blanketed white with snow, called "Nar-ni-a".

Which is a place where animals talk, and the land is ruled by a wicked White Witch.

A witch whose magic spell keeps the entire land always winter, but never Christmas.

Think of that possibility. Remember, Christmas celebrates the birth of God's son. So we number our calendars by His birth.

Question: without the birth of Jesus what year would it be? Someone once wrote: Suppose Jesus had not come and there never was a manger scene.

No star in the east, no angel melody, no awestruck shepherds, then no sermon on the mount.

No reason to love our neighbor. No reconciling cross. No empty tomb. No empowering Holy Spirit and no community of the caring.

Look, If Jesus had not come, our thinking about God would still be fractured, His love forever unknown.

If Jesus had not come, there would be no Messiah, there would be theology but without Christology.

Sin without a Redeemer. Death without a Destroyer. Heaven without assurance.

The Bible says: "Of the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, his paths beyond tracing out."

And so, God came. He still comes to shatter the tinsel, and holly and bright colored packages. He cannot be hidden.

God sent his Son that first Christmas because he loves you and me. He came to us so that we could come to Him.

If you are still living in a world without hope then God's gift in the manger is for you.

I invite you to open His package of love, receive his gift, let Jesus bring warmth, sunshine, light and joy to your heart and home.

Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship