

CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT FAMILY

HEBREWS 1:5

Sending Christmas Cards is a tradition practiced by 90% of Americans. Almost two billion Christmas Cards are sent each holiday season. *But few people will send as many Christmas Cards as our nation's president...*

Richard Nixon mailed 40,000 Christmas cards his first year in office... Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter sent out 125,000 Christmas cards each year... The Clintons had a Christmas Card list of 400,000 addresses...

George and Laura Bush were the big senders. They dropped 1.4 million cards in the White House mailbox...

This year's Presidential Christmas Card features the Obamas' dog, Bo, on a snowy White House lawn. *Don't worry, you'll probably receive yours tomorrow!*

The very first Christmas card was created in 1843, by a man named James Horsley. It was three inches by five inches, and consisted of three panels...

The *left panel* depicted a man feeding the hungry.

The *right panel* pictures a woman clothing the poor.

But in *the middle of the card – the center panel – the card's focal point* - **there's a family!** It's actually a three generation family - kids, parents, grandparents...

At the very center of the first Christmas card ever produced... *there is a family.* And how appropriate!

For if we were to go back in time - *back, back, back in time* - we would find that Christmas has always been a family affair. **Christmas is a celebration of family life.**

This is certainly what God intended when He created Christmas. God identified Himself as a family unit - then He sent His only Son to join a family on Earth. From the beginning Christmas was all about family.

Realize the Christmas story predates God's Spirit overshadowing the virgin womb of a maiden named Mary... It begins before the child is born and laid in a manger... Shepherds and wise men come much later...

Christmas starts in Hebrews 1:5.

Here the writer of the book of Hebrews puts it, **"For to which of the angels did He ever say: "You are My Son, today I have begotten You"? And again: "I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son"?"**

This morning we're beginning a series of Bible Studies I've entitled **"What Christmas Is All About."**

This morning we'll discuss how **"Christmas is About Family..."** Next Sunday how it's **"About Faith..."** And on Christmas Eve how **"Christmas is About Worship..."** And our text for all three is from the book of Hebrews.

Here's some background on this important book of the Bible... Hebrews was written to Jewish readers.

It's an explanation of the preeminence of Jesus!

Jews were and are proud of their religion, yet Hebrews explains how Jesus is better than *Moses, the Levitical priests, the Law, the Sacrifices, the Temple...* **Jesus overshadows all the institutions of Judaism!**

And Hebrews 1 explains *the Son of God's* superiority over *the angels of God...* **Jesus is better than angels!**

In Judaism, angels were highly revered. Since they dwelt in God's presence in Heaven they were envied by men on Earth. Angels had access to God's glory...

The Jews considered the angels national heroes. Angels were active in God's dealings with mankind.

In Acts 7 Stephen points out that the conveyance of the Law to Moses came through the agency of angels.

Hebrew people practically worshipped the angels.

Yet in Hebrews 1 we learn that angels are – and always have been - considered **servants...** On the other hand, Jesus Christ is *God's only begotten Son...*

The angels in heaven are merely *hired-hands* - whereas Jesus sits enthroned at God's *right hand*.

Hebrews 1 takes us back in time before the first Christmas. The author quotes Psalm 2:7 - a prediction of God's coming King - One who'll reign from Israel...

All the nations are His possession...

This King's rule extends to the ends of the Earth...

He'll govern with a rod of iron...

Everyone will obey Him... Then God says to this future King, “**You are My Son, today I have begotten You.**” This coming earthly King will be God’s own Son.

In the same verse, 1:5, the writer of Hebrews double dips. He quotes God again - this time, 2 Samuel 7:14.

Here God is speaking to a man after his own heart, King David. He promises David an heir who will reign for all eternity. Again, the Messiah is in the viewfinder.

And God says of Him, “**I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son?**” God spoke of Jesus not just as a King and ruler, but as a member of His own family.

Don’t underestimate the lofty status Messiah is given when God calls Him His “**Son.**” To Jews the concept of *sonship* is charged with heavy theological implications.

Here’s how the Jewish mind worked... *If you’re the son of a bumblebee that makes you a bumblebee...*

If you’re the son of a cow then you’re a cow...

If you’re the son of a man that makes you a man...

And if you’re the Son of God, then you are the very essence of God... Begotten of God is to be divine.

So when the author of Hebrews quotes God in Psalm 2:7 - “**You are My Son, today I have begotten You..**” and 2 Samuel 7:14 - “**I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son...**” and ascribes these passages to Jesus, he is making a bold declaration...

Jesus is no mere servant of God. He is far more than *an angel* or *a messenger...* Jesus is God in the flesh!

Even today, when Jews come together in their synagogues – for the Sabbath or at their feasts – they quote *the Great Shema*... Deuteronomy 6:4 declares, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!”

This is the Jewish creed - the *motto of monotheism*. This sums up Jewish faith – there is but one God.

And Christianity agrees... there is only one God.

But the Shema itself reveals deeper truths about God. For the Hebrew word translated “one” is the word “*echad*” – which speaks, not of an *absolute unity*, but a *compound unity*. When the rabbis explain “*echad*” they hold up a fist - then point out their one fist is actually five distinct fingers. It’s unity with multiple components.

This is also how God speaks on Himself in Genesis 1:26. When God created the man we’re told, “Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...” Notice, God uses plural pronouns to describe Himself... He speaks of “us” and “our.”

When God speaks of Himself He does so as a plurality. This is what God does throughout the Bible.

God is one God, but He exists in three persons.

Even the Hebrew word translated “*God*” teaches this doctrine. The name, “*Elohim*,” is the plural form of “*EI*.”

God is one God, but He exists in three distinct persons - Father, Son, and Spirit. This is the triune nature of God, or what we refer to as the “*Trinity*.”

God is love. But for love to exist it has to have an object. This is true even for an eternal God. And God's love has had an object. Even when nothing existed by Him - the Father, Son, and Spirit lived in a loving unity.

It reminds me of the little girl who was asked if she knew the term for the nature of God. The teacher was expecting the word "Trinity." Instead the girl answered, "The triplets." *Well, she was close.* She was right about God's three-ness, but forgot about God's one-ness.

Yet here's the point I'm making... From the beginning God chose to define His very nature in terms of a family. God is **the Father**, and **the Son**, and **the Spirit**.

The first member of the Godhead assumed the role of a Father... The Father then calls the second member of the Trinity His Son... As God states in Hebrews, "**I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son...**"

Here's a fascinating thought that you should consider... **the eternal nature of God is like a family!**

Thus, is it any wonder when God created the first man He put him in a family? Adam was created - then Eve - then they were told to be fruitful and multiply.

Which reminds me of a joke, "**Do you know what Adam and Eve were doing after God kicked them out of the Garden of Eden?... They were raising Cain!**"

Adam and Eve got to work on a family.

The first institution - the first community structure - God established on Earth was not a government, or a school, or a city hall, or a temple, or even a church.

It was a family. *This is why family life is so sacred.*

And this is why the biblical definition for family is worth fighting to protect... In the name of fairness secular society may choose to award economic benefits to folks in various types of relationships. That's an issue to debate... But that's a far cry from changing the very definition of marriage and rewiring family life.

Modern relationships and biblical families are NOT created equal. God's ideal is for one man and one woman, to rear kids, in a lifelong marital commitment.

Certainly, some people can achieve a measure of success through inferior arrangements. *But we're foolish to think that an exception should make the rule.*

Just because a blind contestant can win a skeet-shooting competition, doesn't mean everybody should close their eyes before they pull the trigger on a rifle.

For centuries the biblical schematic for marriage has provided a solid foundation for western society, and a healthy environment for children. In addition, *biblical marriage is the preference of an all-wise and loving God...* If we think you're smarter than God... beware!

The nuclear family is the configuration that's sacred and special because it's the arrangement blessed by God. Thus, it should be favored over other alternatives.

Not because you or I said so - *but God said so!*

There's nothing prejudicial about society recognizing the best arrangement for family... then promoting it and protecting it, for the greater good of its citizens.

Here's the inescapable truth, when it came time for the holy, sinless, Almighty, all-knowing God to join the human race guess where He chose to be born?

He was birthed into a family of one man and one woman united together in the bonds of marriage!

Think of it this way, God left His heavenly confines for a barren land – a land scarred by sin – a land of hate, and anger, and lust, and death, and selfishness.

When Jesus came to Earth His new environment was nothing like the home He'd left. Heaven has as much in common with Earth as Hawaii has with Alaska.

This is why Jesus was born into the one earthly environment most like heaven - *the family*. Jesus was *the Son* in heaven long before He was *a son* on earth.

At Christmas we talk about Jesus being born in Bethlehem – or in a stable – or He was laid in manger.

But here's the best answer to the question - *“Where was Jesus born?” Into a family*. God chose the family of Joseph, and his wife, Mary, to rear His Son.

It reminds me of a three year old named Blake.

His mom and dad had been careful to teach him just how much Jesus loved him. One day his dad asked the little guy, *“Blake, where does Jesus live?”* The father expected his son to answer: *“in heaven,”* or *“in my heart,”* or even *“in Bethlehem”* (since it was Christmas).

After thinking awhile, little Blake replied, *“Dad, Jesus lives in our basement.”* *That made sense to Blake since that's where the family stored their Christmas decorations - the nativity scene and its plastic baby.*

Yet what a blessing this would be if it were true of every family... [Jesus lives in your basement...](#) and your living room, and all your bedrooms, and your kitchen!

Jesus lives in the bowels of your home!

Imagine, Jesus living in the places your kids hang out, and your family has fun, and your goodies are stored, and where everyone is free to goof off and be themselves... *Jesus lives in the heart of your home.*

When Jesus came to earth He knew He would be born in Bethlehem - and take refuge in Egypt - and be reared in Nazareth - and visit Jerusalem's Temple - and travel the countryside surrounding the Sea of Galilee...

But His immediate destination was a family.

And it wasn't a rich family, or an opulent family, or a prestigious family, or a large family. In fact, Joseph and Mary's family was poor, and humble, and nondescript.

Remember, when Jesus was circumcised, Joseph couldn't afford the customary sacrifice – *a lamb*. He had to opt for a pauper's exemption – *two turtledoves*.

That means that Joseph was dirt poor. It had been a long time since he'd had two quarters to rub together.

Yet this family had ingredients money can't buy...

It was a loving family, a loyal family, a worshipping family, an obedient family, and a believing family...

It was truly a little bit of heaven on earth. And that's why God chose their family as a sanctuary for His Son.

I love this thought... **Christmas is about family.**

It was into a family – *a man and a woman, not yet intimate, but already betrothed and legally committed* - that the Holy Spirit worked a miracle of conception.

It was a family - not a military escort - that took the rigorous road trip from Nazareth down to Bethlehem...

It was a family - not a Mash Unit of doctors - that camped out in a stable, and oversaw the baby's birth...

And it was a family - not a royal court - that the shepherds found when they came to see the King...

Two years later *it was a family* to whom the wise men handed gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh...

The institution of the family should be forever *ennobled and exalted and dignified and glorified* - if for no other reason that Jesus was born into a family!

That means if you have a family – *and we all do* – you should pay it special attention this Christmas.

Even if your family has been through some tough times lately - don't give up on your family. Don't neglect or ignore your family - even a dysfunctional family.

When Jesus entered the world He came to be part of a family. And I believe Jesus still targets families...

He wants to work a miracle in your family this Christmas. Remember, Jesus doesn't just love families in general - but He loves *your* family specifically...

Often when we think of the family of Joseph and Mary we assume that they were the perfect family. *God wouldn't send His sinless Son into a flawed family...*

He picked *a choice couple with a mint marriage.*

We envision Joseph and Mary sharing a pristine, peaceful, idyllic life together. No way did they have the kinds of hang-ups, and issues, and baggage we carry.

Yet we're so naive with our assumptions... Mary is just a little girl. Joseph is a construction worker. *You don't think their hearts were full of apprehension, fear, worry, doubt?* They have no idea what they're doing.

There's a movie called "*The Nativity Story.*" It chronicles the events leading up to the birth of Jesus.

One scene paints a picture of a nervous Joseph and Mary trying to sort out their predicament together...

They've been travelling the long, rocky road from Nazareth south to Bethlehem, when they stop for the evening by the Sea of Galilee. Joseph must've caught a fish that day, because Mary is cooking a fish dinner.

She says with a smile, *"The baby is moving."*

As she rubs her hand across her belly, Joseph looks at her with a mixture of excitement and concern.

She asks him, *"You never really told me about your dream."* Apparently, Joseph doesn't feel like talking, but Mary pries it out of him... *"No, really. Tell me."*

Joseph answers her as if he's still amazed... *"The angel came. He told me the child within you had been conceived by the Holy Spirit and I shouldn't be afraid."*

Mary is depending on this man for so much... She asks him, *"Are you afraid?"* Joseph whispers, *"Yes, are you?"* She replies, *"Yes."* They both giggle nervously.

But Mary is thinking far into the future. She continues, *"Do you ever wonder when we'll know? When we'll know He knows He's more than just a child. Will it be something He says... or a look in His eye?"*

Joseph shrugs. He's staggering under the weight of responsibility for fathering God. He admits to Mary, *"I wonder if... if I'll even be able to teach Him anything."*

The scene reminds us that these two were just kids.

If you think Jesus was born into family that had it all together - let me suggest, you need to think again...

Joseph and Mary were recoiling from events that had caught them off-guard - and changed their lives - and put them in positions that were out of their control...

They were a family - *but by anyone's standards, they were just barely a family.* Joseph and Mary had the odds stacked against them. If they'd come to me for counseling I might've cautioned them to step back and go slow. If they'd asked their parents and the good townsfolk what to do, they might've split up for good.

Understand, the Christmas miracle begins with a troubled relationship. A husband and his betrothed wife are struggling to even stay together. Joseph was contemplating an exit strategy... *have Mary stoned or just send her to a near-by city and let her start over...*

I don't care how much you've disliked your spouse I'll bet you've never considered having them stoned. *Electric chair maybe... a firing squad... but not stoned!*

For a long while, Joseph particularly, had to work through some serious trust issues... Did he really buy the angel's explanation? He was trapped between *believing the impossible* or *accepting Mary's infidelity*...

And that's just the start of a long list of challenges...

Here was a relationship where at first, the wife was listening to God, while her husband really wasn't...

This is a marriage that starts out with an unexpected pregnancy and all the problems that can cause...

Joseph and Mary are all stressed out when they're forced to make a trip home for the holidays...

And obviously, Joseph had lousy health insurance - *Mary gives birth in a barn*. It's been said, "[The reason Jesus was born in a stable was Joseph had an HMO.](#)"

I'm also sure their budget tightened considerably when Mary had to start purchasing swaddling clothes.

And what about the families forced exodus to Egypt? A relocation only added to the upheaval in their lives.

It was obvious, [Jesus' family had a rough start!](#)

Think it through and you'll agree, Jesus was born to a family facing many of the struggles your family faces.

Mary and Joseph *didn't* have a perfect marriage, yet Jesus - *the One greater than the angels* - still graced their family with His presence. That first Christmas, the Son of God chose to join a very, very imperfect family.

That's why there's hope for your family this Christmas... Your family might also be struggling...

In the bowels and basement of your house there's strife, and anger, and worry, and friction... Perhaps your family is on the ropes... It's down for the count...

Maybe there's a lack of trust between members...

Or you're hearing from God, but nobody else is...

Or an unexpected pregnancy - or some other unexpected circumstance - has heated up the pressure cooker in which you live. You're groping for direction...

Maybe it's a trip home - or a visit from your in-laws - that has you stressed out... Or it's a lack of income and health insurance... or the kids are a drain... or you realize diapers cost far more than swaddling clothes...

And why, oh why, does your husband want to chase his dream and move the family to Egypt? You're just now meeting a few of your neighbors in Bethlehem.

It reminds me of the husband and wife who were in the midst of a squabble. They wanted to buy a new vehicle for Christmas. *He* wanted a heavy-duty truck, while she had her eye on a fast, fancy new sports car.

They argued for days over the decision.

Finally, the wife laid down an ultimatum... "If I don't get something that'll go from 0 to 180 in four seconds you're going to experience a very lonely Christmas."

Well, the husband bristled up. He didn't like her attitude. So on Christmas AM there it was - wrapped in a bright yellow ribbon - **a new bathroom scale.** *Funeral arrangements for the husband are still pending...*

If there's friction in your family this Holiday season... between husband and wife, or parent and child - whatever you do, don't give up! *Don't anybody give up!*

Even if your family is coming apart faster than gift-wrapping on Christmas AM - listen to **“good tidings of great joy...”** **Jesus wants to be part of your family!**

The Holy Spirit wants to overshadow you and yours, and work a miracle in your midst. He wants to spread goodwill toward men and bring peace on earth – and have it commence in your family! Jesus brings new life to dying hopes... fresh breath to stale relationships...

Pastor Gordon MacDonald tells of a Nigerian lady he met after a speaking engagement. She was a prominent physician in a local hospital. She identified herself to MacDonald by an obviously American name.

That's when he asked, **“What's your African name?”**

She immediately strung together several beautiful, rhythmic syllables. Her name had a musical quality. MacDonald asked her, **“What does your name mean?”**

She replied, **“Child who takes the anger away.”**

Of course, a pastor can always sense a good story, so he asked her to explain the meaning of her name...

This was the lady's answer... **“My parents were forbidden to marry, but they loved each other, and they defied the family opinion and married anyway.**

For several years their parents refused to have any contact with them... until my mother became pregnant with me... And when my grandparents held me in their arms for the first time, the walls of hostility came down.

I was the one who swept the anger away. And that's the name my mother and father gave to me..."

This also would've been a great name for Jesus when He was born. When a person comes to the manger and bows before the newborn King, Jesus sweeps away their anger, and pride, and prejudices.

Jesus doesn't just forgive us, in doing so, He enables us to forgive others... He causes us to love the person we previously thought was unlovable...

Christmas is all about the harmony and happiness Jesus wants to bring when He's invited to join a family.

Author CS Lewis' wrote a classic tale entitled, "[The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe](#)" *Perhaps you saw the movie.* It's an allegorical that displays the Gospel.

Aslan, the lion, dies to save the young boy, Edmund.

Then Aslan rises from the dead to lead a campaign against the witch that's in control of the land of Narnia.

Obviously, the message is obvious... Revelation 5 refers to Jesus as "[the lion of the tribe of Judah.](#)" Jesus died to save us, then rose from the dead, and promises to return to free this world from the dominion of Satan.

I once read an article about CS Lewis and his own personal struggles at the time he wrote this story.

He started work on the novel at a miserable period in his life. His writing reflected his mood. Lewis said, "[At first it seemed a bumbling story, flat and uninspired...](#)"

What turned it around was the introduction of the lion. Not only did Lewis finish “*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*,” the series includes six more novels.

After finishing the last story Lewis commented on the first, “Only when the great lion Aslan came “*bounding into it*” did I stop bumbling, and the story began to move in its proper course. Aslan pulled the whole story together...” And when you let “the King of the Jungle” *bound* into your family - you and the folks you love will stop bumbling, and pull together in a proper course.

In our text, the writer of Hebrews proves a vital point, “To which of the angels did (God) ever say... I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son?”

God defined Himself in family terms - as “*Father*” and “*Son*” - proving forever that Christmas is about family!

Last year was a special Christmas for my family.

Some of you were here... As I was preaching the Christmas Eve service my oldest son and my daughter-in-law were in the throes of having a child.

Just before I got up to speak I got a text message that read... “*Jess is pushing.*” When I finished, I looked again at my phone, and there was a picture of Quincy.

It was a Christmas Eve I’ll never forget!

As I think about it, all my Christmas memories are about *my family* - and *experiences with my family*.

You can take away the presents, and the tree, and the decorations, and the parties, and the egg-nog, and even Kathy’s pancakes Christmas AM - and Christmas will still be Christmas for me if my family stays intact.

Christmas is about family.

Yet why do we make it about so many other things...

From snatch and grab, and fight the mob on Black Friday... to who can overindulge their kids the most... to the stress of finding the right tree for the living room...

Remember this Christmas what really matters.

Prioritize your family this Christmas...

If there's a bridge that needs to be built... or a fence that needs to be mended... or a hatchet that needs to be buried... or a statement that needs to be made...

By all means, let's get busy.

I guarantee, for folks living in Newtown Connecticut, this year, their Christmas will be all about family!

Spouses will lay aside their petty grievances.

They'll hug the children that are still with them - as they mourn the twenty others that aren't around to be hugged... But I'm certain that every Christmas thought in Newtown will revolve back around to their family.

Family members grow familiar - and we're tempted to neglect the commonplace. Yet in the wake of the Newtown tragedy, *we've all been put on notice...*

Never take your family for granted! Christmas is the time for us all to reaffirm our commitment to our family.

When your family gathers together this Christmas remember Jesus is looking for an entry into your family.

The first Christmas was all about Jesus joining a family - and every Christmas since, Jesus has been looking for families who will open up and invite Him in.

This year, you be the one who opens the door!

Be the one who believes that Jesus loves your family, and will work the healing your family needs!

Remember this weekend, that your family is just a prayer away from Jesus working a Christmas miracle in the people you love! Christmas proves that God's heart beats for every family... *especially your family!*