

WHAT CHRISTMAS IS ALL ABOUT

CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT FAMILY

HEBREWS 1:5

During the holidays we are giving out Christmas cards. If you need this week's edition raise your hand. This week's card reads, "Christmas is about Family" which is the theme of this morning's message. Please, use the card to jot down the points you'd like to recall.

Actually, the first ever commercial Christmas card was created in 1843 - commissioned by a man named Henry Cole, and drawn by artist, James Horsley.

One-thousand cards were printed. About thirty still exist. Recently, one of the originals sold for \$10,000.

The first card was three inches by five inches, and consisted of three panels... The left panel shows 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, and grandparents... At the very center of the first Christmas card ever produced... there is a family.

And how appropriate is that! 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 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"?"

Today, we continue a series of messages entitled, "What Christmas Is All About." Last week we discussed "Christmas Is About Connections." It connects past with present, east and west, young and old, mundane and miraculous, and heaven with earth.

On Christmas Eve we'll dwell on the idea, "Christmas Is About Worship." On the Sunday after Christmas we'll explore, "Christmas is About Faith." But this morning our focus is... "Christmas Is About Family."

And for all four lessons our text comes from the book of Hebrews. Here's a bit of background on this important book of the Bible... Hebrews was written to Hebrews... It was penned to Jewish believers in Jesus.

Which reminds me, did you hear of the newlyweds lying in bed one morning. The hubby says to his wife, "Honey, why don't you go and make us some coffee?" She tells him, "No, no, no, that's your job, not my job!"

The man answered, “Says who?” The wife responds, “Well, the Bible tells us so.” The fellow snaps back, “The Bible! Where in the world does the Bible say anything about a husband making the morning coffee?”

The wife replies, “It’s he-brews, not she-brews.”

Actually the Hebrews who were beneficiaries of this book were Jews trying to break free from the traditions that bound them. Realize, Judaism was an old, proud, unbending religion that exalted Moses, the Law, the Temple, the priesthood, the sacrifices, and the angels.

Yet the Jews who had believed in the Gospel needed to know that their Savior Jesus had eclipsed and superseded all the institutions of Judaism. Jesus was a better priest, and a better sacrifice. He was superior to Moses, and the Temple, and the Law, and even angels.

In Judaism, the angels of God were highly revered.

Since they dwelt in God’s presence in heaven they were envied by men on Earth. They had access to God’s glory. In addition, the angels were heroes, active in God’s dealings with man. In Acts 7 Stephen said that the conveyance of the Law to Moses came through angels. Some Jews practically worshipped the angels.

But in our text, Hebrews 1, we learn that angels are, and always have been, mere **servants**. Verse 7 calls them “**ministers**.” Again in verse 14 they are servants to us. It says, “**ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation.**”

Whereas, Jesus is God’s only begotten **Son!**

The angels in heaven are God's 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 - a prediction of God's coming King - One who will 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 quotes God again - this time from 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 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 works... **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 God, His very essence... Begotten of God is to be divine. This is why John 3:16 calls Jesus God's "only begotten Son."

So when the author of Hebrews quotes God in Psalm 2 - "You are My Son, today I have begotten You.." and in 2 Samuel 7 - "I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son..." and he 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 - on 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 a bound together kind of unity.

This is also how God speaks of Himself in Genesis 1:26. When God creates the first 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 “El.”

God is one God, but He exists in three distinct persons. This is the triune nature of God, or the Trinity.

Once a little girl was asked if she knew the term for the nature of God. Obviously, the teacher was looking for “Trinity.” Instead the girl answered, “The triplets.”

Well, she was close. She was right about God’s three-ness, but she’d forgotten about God’s one-ness.

I like this diagram. God is three persons - Father, Son, and Spirit - yet He’s one God. All three members are equally God. Yet all three are unique and distinct.

Here’s my point, God defines His very nature in terms of a family. He is **the Father, Son, and Spirit**. One member of the Godhead assumes the role of Father, another the role of Son. As God states in our text, **“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 for. The audacity of our modern world and its willingness to ignore 6000 years of history and our cumulative wisdom - as well as, sacred Scripture - and redefine marriage and family life is appalling.

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

Certainly, some people can achieve a measure of success through inferior arrangements. But we are 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.

Realize, **biblical marriage is the preference of an all-wise and loving Creator - a God who knows better than we.** God considers it the configuration that provides kids the best chance of growing up healthy and whole.

The nuclear family should be favored over all other alternatives, not because you or I said so, but God said so!

And there's nothing unfair about a society recognizing the best configuration for a family; then promoting and protecting that arrangement for the greater good of its citizens. In fact, it's compassionate.

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 environs were nothing like the land He had left. Heaven has as much in common with Earth as Hawaii has with Antarctica.

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

It reminds me of the 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 his 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 in your living room, and in your bedrooms, and kitchen!

Jesus lives in the bowels of our homes! He lives in the very place where my kids and grandkids hang out, and our family has fun, and goodies are shared, and everyone is free to goof off and be themselves. Imagine, if Jesus lived in the very heart of every home.

When Jesus came to earth He knew He would be born in Bethlehem - and later take refuge in the land of Egypt - and ultimately be reared in Nazareth - and one day visit Jerusalem’s Temple - and travel the villages and 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 awhile since he and Mary 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 to be a sanctuary for His Son.

I love this thought... [Christmas is about family.](#)

It was in 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.

And when the shepherds received the news from the angel of the King's arrival, and came running to check it out for themselves, they found - not a modern hospital - or the accouterments of a royal court - or a MASH unit of medical technicians - or even a military sentinel standing guard over the baby... [but a family!](#)

Even two years later wise men handed over gifts of gold, frankincense, myrrh - to what was still a family.

The institution of the nuclear family is forever ennobled and exalted and dignified and glorified, if for no other reason than [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 and rough times lately - don't give up on your family. Don't neglect or ignore your family - even if it's 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 Jesus loves your family specifically!

Often when we think of the family of Joseph and Mary we assume they were the perfect family. They were the Waltons or Cleavers of first-century Nazareth.

God wouldn't send His sinless Son into a flawed family, would He? He must've picked a choice couple, with a mint marriage, and do-no-wrong siblings.

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

Yet we're so naive with our assumptions. At the time of Jesus' birth, Mary is just a little girl - barely a teen. And Joseph has no experience in these matters. He's a construction guy. You don't think their hearts were full of apprehension, and worry, and fear, and doubt?

There's a movie called "[The Nativity Story](#)," that 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 traveling the long, rocky road from Nazareth south to Bethlehem, when they stop for the evening by a body of water. Mary is cooking a fish for supper that Joseph must've caught earlier that day.

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 want to talk, but Mary tries to pry it out of him... "No, really. Tell me. "

Joseph leans in and says, "The angel came to me. He told me the child within you had been conceived by the Holy Spirit and that I should not be afraid."

Mary is depending on this man, so 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 that He knows He's more than just a child. Will it be something He says... a look in his eye?"

Joseph offers a helpless shrug. He's obviously aware of his own inadequacies. He confesses to Mary, "I wonder if... if I'll even be able to teach him anything."

The scene reminds me these two were still just kids.

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

These were kids 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 take a step back and go slow. If they'd

asked their parents and the 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! Gas chamber... firing squad maybe... but not a stoning!

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 grueling 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.](#)"

Imagine too, 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 true, **Jesus' family had a rough start!**

Think it over and you'll agree, Jesus was born to a family facing many of the struggles today's families face. 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 its members... Or you are hearing from God, but nobody else is... Or an unexpected pregnancy - or some other surprising circumstance has heated up the pressure cooker you're living in, and you're groping for some 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 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. But he wanted a new 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 morning there it was, marked by a bright red bow... a new bathroom scale. Funeral arrangements for the husband will be announced soon.

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 you’re family is coming apart faster than gift-wrapping on Christmas Day - there’s still “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...

Gordon MacDonald tells of a Nigerian lady he met after a speaking engagement. This lady identified herself as a physician in a prominent hospital. She gave MacDonald an obviously American name. That’s when he asked her, “What’s your African name?”

She immediately strung together several beautiful, rhythmic syllables. Her name had a musical sound.

MacDonald asked her, “What does your name mean?” She replied, “Child who takes the anger away.”

Of course, Gordon MacDonald sensed a good story, so he asked her to explain how she got her name. This was her answer... “My parents were forbidden to marry, but they loved each other, and they defied the family opinion and married anyway. At first their parents refused to have contact with them, until my mother became pregnant with me. When my grandparents held me in their arms for the first time, the walls of hostility came down. My birth swept the anger away. And that’s the name my mother and father gave me...”

This also would’ve been a good name for Jesus when He was born. When you come to the manger and bow before the newborn King, Jesus sweeps away your anger, and pride, and prejudices, and selfishness.

Jesus doesn’t just forgive us, but in doing so, He enables us to forgive others. His love for us causes us to love the person we formerly thought was unlovable.

Christmas is about the harmony and happiness He brings with Him when Jesus is invited to join a family.

Author CS Lewis’ wrote a classic tale entitled, “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe” Perhaps you’ve seen the movie. It’s an allegory of 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.

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 in a miserable period in his life. His writing reflected his mood. Lewis recalled, “At first it seemed a bumbling story, flat and uninspired...”

But 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 the last story was completed Lewis commented about 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 “the King of the Jungle” comes bounding into your life - your family 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?” It’s God who defines Himself in family terms - as “Father” and “Son” - proving forever that Christmas is about family!

For my family, 2011 was a special Christmas. Some of you were here that Christmas Eve. As I got up to preach my daughter-in-law was in the throes of labor.

Just before I took the pulpit, my son Zach, texted me, “Jess is pushing.” When I finished my sermon I looked at my phone

again, and up popped a photo of my grandson, Quincy. It was a Christmas, I'll never forget!

As I think about it, almost all my Christmas memories center on my family. Take away the presents, the tree, the decorations, the parties, the egg-nog, even Kathy's pancakes on Christmas morning - and Christmas will still be Christmas to me if my family relationships are healthy and intact. Christmas is about family.

Yet why do we make it about so many other things. From supply chain worries, to fighting 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... If there's a bridge that's been burned and needs to be rebuilt... or a fence that needs mending... or a hatchet that needs burying... or a statement that needs to be made... let's get busy.

I guarantee, for folks living in Mayfield Kentucky this year, Christmas will be about family! People will lay aside petty concerns. Even the loss of a car or a house won't be as important as the ability to hug the spouse and kids who survived the tornados. Everything in Mayfield will pale in comparison in light of families!

Until we taste a tragedy, family can get familiar. We can neglect the commonplace and the familiar face.

Yet the Mayfield families have been reminded that no one should ever take their family members for granted.

When your family gathers this Christmas recall Jesus is looking for an entry... The first Christmas was about Jesus joining a family, and during every Christmas since, Jesus looks for families who will open up and invite Him in. You be the person who opens the door!

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

Remember this week 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!