

Pastor Letter: Working on Christmas Day (12/25/22)

This year Christmas Day falls on the Lord's Day, the day when good Christians gather as the body of Christ to worship Almighty God. This year many families will attend a Christmas Eve worship service so they may feel that it is ok to stay home with the family to celebrate the traditional gift exchange, holiday meal, and family gatherings. One individual shared that their congregational Christmas Day worship service would be a recorded Zoom format so the parishioners could watch later after the typical family traditions. The Covid-19 pandemic has left a lasting scar upon our Christian traditions.

While watching several Christmas TV shows about how our Hebrew friends spend Christmas Day. I was surprised to learn most Jewish families eat Chinese food on Christmas Day because those are the only restaurants open on that Christian holiday. I began to think about what other people work on Christmas Day.

When I served in the military, I often found myself working on Christmas Day because being single, I volunteered to work which allowed the married servicemen to spend the day with their families. If I was not actively working at my duty station, I was restricted to the barracks or near a telephone so I could respond if any emergency should arise. Christmas dinner was often whatever the mess hall was serving.

When we first returned to civilian life, I was working at a refinery with a continuous operation. We worked shiftwork which required working 7 days a week and even on holidays. Our family Christmas celebrations and worship services depended upon my work schedule at the refinery.

How many other occupations require their employees to be on the job during the Christmas holidays? Firemen, Police, EMT's, doctors, nurses, transportation workers, and many other necessary people are on the job, while we are celebrating this special holiday with family and friends.

Regardless of where we are or what we are going this Christmas Day, each of us should take some time to reflect on why this day is so special or so holy. We celebrate Almighty God leaving his heavenly throne in order to become one of us. A spiritual God took upon himself the limitations of a human being, becoming incarnate in human flesh so we in-turn could become the children of God. God was doing for us what we human beings could not accomplish for ourselves.

The first people, other than Mary and Joseph, to witness this miraculous event were lowly shepherds who were working that first Christmas Day. Luke records this glorious revelation with the words, "In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord,'" (Luke 2:8-11). They left their sheep and went to see this baby in a manger.

God chose these lowly shepherds to be the first witnesses to this glorious event but they also become the first evangelists to share this good news or great joy with the world. Luke records, "So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The

shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them,” (vv. 16-20).

The lowly shepherds responded to this miraculous event by glorifying and praising God much like how we celebrate Christmastide today. There never seems to be enough Sunday worship services in Advent and Christmastide to sing all the Christmas songs that have been written to celebrate the incarnation of our Lord. We respond much like the Psalmist instructs us to celebrate, “Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD,” (Psalm 98:4-6).

Regardless how we celebrate Christmas Day this year, we should all keep in mind the true reason for the season. In the midst of personal, secular, social, family, or religious traditions, the Lord should be the focus of our holiday celebrations. In the hiatus of trying to meet all the demands of the holiday seasonal checklist, we should not lose sight of God’s purpose, plan, and process of that first Christmas Day so long ago.

I will be working again on this upcoming Christmas Day along with a long list of other necessary individuals. Although I might be earning my salary on December 25th, I will also be leading a worship service that directs the body of Christ to focus upon the Triune God’s incarnation on that first Christmas morning, a wooden cross, an empty tomb, ascension of our Lord, and the second coming of the risen Christ. We will sing some of those favorite Christmas hymns in celebration.

Even if you can’t personally join us in a joyous celebration in worship, take a few moments to reflect on why this specific Day is so special and so holy. Spend some time in quiet remembrance of past Christmas Day celebrations and thank the Lord for the blessings of those precious memories. Thank the Lord for all those necessary people who are working so we can revel with family and friends.

Have a very Merry Christmas!

Pastor Larry