**A King is Born**

**Isiah 9: 12-17**

**John 8: 12-19**

This is where I say Merry Christmas!

A few weeks ago, I found myself wondering around Hobby Lobby. As I made myself over to one of the corners of the store, I noticed a section completely cleared out and a few items on the shelves. As I looked more closely, the manager was setting up for the Christmas display. Christmas items were going on the shelves in July. As I made my way over to the other side of the store, I noticed the entire middle section was set up with Fall and Thanksgiving displays. By now, I am thinking what in the World, we just celebrated our Nation’s Birthday a few days ago. A few days later, I was talking to someone about this service and the response I got was “I hate Christmas in July.” I wanted to respond, with love of course, I guess you hate Jesus too, but I didn’t. I simply responded well I love Christmas in July, in fact I love Christmas every day of the year.

Now, I completely get why someone in today’s World would make a comment like that. We have come to commercialize Christmas that I think it has taken the real meaning of Christmas away. Putting the tree up and decorating it with bulbs, garland, tinsel, lights, ornaments, and a star or an angel at the top. Setting up the village and making sure the train is in place underneath. Arranging the manger scene. Completing the cards and making sure they are sent. Baking the cookies, and making the candy. Decorating the house, putting the lights up and checking them out. Wrapping the gifts, and sending the packages. Inviting the guests. Preparing the meal and cleaning the house. No wonder someone would make that comment. So many times, we choose when to celebrate Christ for a time, and then, simply pack him away until a future need. Can’t we just celebrate Christmas without all the fluff? That’s why this morning I thought that it would be nice to celebrate Christmas in July with no preparations, no fluff, just a time to relax and reflect on the real Christmas story. The Birth of a King! A King that brought people out of darkness and into a World of light. After all, it is believed that Jesus was born sometime between the middle of June or July. We really don’t know.

Christmas in July, was actually started in 1933 at a Girl’s Church camp in North Carolina. The camp leader came up with the idea and it stuck. In 1940 there was even a movie that was made. I remember as a young teenager my family had a boat and we use to go to the docks at Clark at the Shenango lake and celebrated Christmas in July. All the boat owners would decorate their boats, and there was a parade around the lake, and a contest for the best decorated boat was held. Many campgrounds today celebrate Christmas in July a way to unite campers. So celebrating Christmas in July is not a rare thing.

As Dr. Seuss puts it in ‘How the Grinch Stole Christmas’: "It came without ribbons! It came without tags! It came without packages, boxes, or bags! …"Maybe Christmas," the Grinch thought, "doesn't come from a store. Maybe Christmas… perhaps… means a little bit more!"

So, as we celebrate the birth of this King on this hot July morning, let us remember that this babe comes to us in a time of need. In the reading that Catherine read for us, the people were walking in darkness and saw a great light. There was gloom, doubt, despair, uncertainly, and yet, a child was born who was going to change the World. Isaiah gives the people that glimmer of hope and promise. The northern tribes were the first to suffer from the invasions, so in God’s mercy, they will be the first to see the light of the Messiah. This glorious prophecy of the birth of Messiah reminds Israel that the victory-bringing Messiah would be a man. What an amazing mystery! There is nothing weaker, more helpless, more dependent than a child. The Messiah could have come as a fully-grown man, created as an adult even as Adam was created. But for Jesus to fully identify with humanity, and to display in His life the servant nature that is in God. What glorious truth! We needed a perfect, infinite Being to offer a perfect, infinite atonement for our sins.

Jim was leaving church after Christmas services when the pastor greeted him and said, “Jim, it’s time you joined the Army of the Lord. We need to see you every Sunday.” “I’m already in the Army of the Lord, Pastor,” Jim replied. “Then why do we only see you on Christmas and Easter?” Jim, looked to the right and to the left, and then leaned over to whisper, “I’m in the Secret Service.”

As we look at our text this morning, we see another important “I am” statement made by Jesus. “I am the light of the World.” In the text that I had just read for you, in verse 12 we read: “Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’ What a great message, for this time of the world, that it seems all we can see is doom and darkness. I think so many times that we have lost our Christian values and we have forgotten the real meaning of the Christmas story. It so much more than a baby born in a manger and wise men going to visit. Again, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’

Will Willimon says this about the I am statement: “God's self-revelation in Jesus: This statement is seen as central to the Christian faith, where God reveals himself through Jesus of Nazareth.”

In a recent survey, nearly a third of those questioned stated, that of all the persons mentioned in the Christmas story, they identified the most with the shepherds. The shepherds were average, ordinary people and were invited to see the birth of the King of kings! Aren’t we those ordinary people?

I remember a Christmas scene that Issac arranged in the front of the church one year, probably the most meaningful "crib" I have ever seen. Three small wood-carved figures made in India: a poor woman, a poor man, and a small child between them. The carving is simple, nearly primitive. No eyes, no ears, no mouths, just the contours of the faces. The figures are smaller than a human hand--nearly too small to attract attention at all. But then--a beam of light shines on the three figures and projects large shadows on the wall of the sanctuary. That says it all. The light thrown on the smallness of Mary, Joseph, and the Child projects them as large, hopeful shadows against the walls of our life and our world. As we move about in our daunting World today, I would hope that you will see and recognize that bright light for what it is. God’s love for us. God’s way of telling us to go out and share the light with others.

In a Charlie Brown Christmas, Charlie Brown was having trouble getting into the Christmas spirit so Linus said, “Charlie Brown, you’re the only person I know who can take a wonderful season like Christmas and turn it into a problem.” Unfortunately, some Christians seem to have the same problem as Charlie Brown when we should be lifting up our Lord and Saviour.

In a moment, you will be given a light and then you will share that light with your neighbor. I want to remind you, that you have gifts that make the world better. It is in your kindness, your positivity, and your energy. Your light is the goodness you share with those around you. It shines in your smile, your laugh, your attitude, your determination, your resilience and your creativity. By sharing, your gifts become gifts to those around you. They inspire and comfort. They remind us of the powerful positive impact we can have on each other. And at the end of our days, that’s the only thing that matters. I hope on this day, you will remember to go out and share those gifts.

In closing I would like to quote the Theologian John Piper’s about the church and Jesus. Piper says “what the World needs from the church more than anything else is our indomitable joy in Jesus in the midst of suffering and sorrow.”

Christmas is the mysterious wonder of the Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing. Christmas is God sending the Light into our Darkness. Christmas is God bringing Life, life for all people. God changes the world in Jesus Christ and shines so brightly that not even death can stop the love of God. All of this takes place in order, to restore humankind to communion with God. What mystery! What love! A king is born Christ the Lord. Amen.