

CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT FAITH

HEBREWS 10:5-9

We're currently in a series of messages we're calling, "What Christmas is All About." We've discussed how "Christmas is About Family" - and "Christmas is About Worship." But *Christmas is also about Faith...*

And that's what I'd like to discuss this morning...

One year I ran across an internet advertisement by a company called Design Crafters. They market a line of Christmas cards called "*Classy Christmas Cards.*"

Here's a description of their product...

"These classy greeting cards express Christmas in many elegant ways. They are more expensive than most other holiday cards, but there is a good reason for it. These beautifully exquisite greeting cards definitely stand out in a crowd. Many of the cards are layered. Many have cut-outs, bows, or ribbons. Many have gold or silver heavy embossing. If you want to look extravagant, these exquisite cards are for you..."

I read that and thought, *what a contrast between Classy Christmas Cards and the first Christmas!*

Trust me there was nothing classy or exquisite about *the smelly stable where Jesus was born* - or *the saliva-stained feed trough in which His tiny body was laid* - or *the barnyard rags they wrapped around Him* - or *the grimy shepherds to whom the angels appeared* - or even *the road weary wise guys who paid a later visit...*

There was no gold embossing anywhere on that first Christmas. To the casual observer there was nothing elegant about Joseph, Mary, or the scene of Jesus' birth. Ironically, classy cards celebrate a humble event.

In comparison to Jesus' throne in heaven there was nothing on Earth that He would've considered *classy*.

The road Jesus traveled from heaven to earth was a long, and steep, and dangerous descent. Our Savior dove head first into our muck and mire and mess.

It reminds me of a fellow and his buddies who visited a barbecue house in North Georgia. The men drove an hour to get there. It was “[all you can eat rib night.](#)”

And it didn't take long for the mound of gnawed bones and dirty napkins to pile high. Long after they should have, the men admitted they'd had enough.

They paid their bill and started to leave, but the driver couldn't find his car keys. He looked in his pockets... *nothing but lint*... He looked through the car window to see if they were still in the ignition... *nada*.

Suddenly, it hit him. When he sat down to eat he'd laid his keys on his tray. Evidently, the keys got covered with napkins, and were still on his tray when he emptied it in the wastebasket. Tragically, this man's car keys were [at the bottom of all you can eat rib night!](#)

It would've been a long walk home, and neither he or his friends wanted to hail a very expensive cab ride...

There was only one thing to do... [dive in!](#)

For the next fifteen minutes the desperate searcher fished through rib bones, spit-up barbecue sauce, baked beans, half-eaten corn on the cobs, slushy cole slaw, pools of back-washed tea, and gobs of saliva-soaked napkins... until finally he found his keys.

When the man pulled his arm out of the bottomless pit it was coated with a thick layer of trashcan slime.

Yet this is what Jesus did that first Christmas!

Mankind was lost in a slime called sin, and rather than call someone else to bail us out - or drive home without us – Jesus dove into our filthy, fallen world.

In Christ, God reached down on that first Christmas morning, and picked what was lost out of the trash.

I say this with all due respect, but [our God is a dumpster diving God](#). Jesus loves sinners like you and me, and refused to leave us at the bottom of the can.

Nobody likes to stick their hand into an ocean of scraps, and slobber, and spit... *Along with a set of car keys, who knows what else you might run across?*

Here's a truth... it took faith and courage for Jesus to leave a blissful heaven and dive into our dumpster.

GK Chesterton once said, [“Alone of all creeds, Christianity has added courage to the virtues of the Creator.”](#) God could've stayed put. He created a perfect world that we defiled and defaced. The Creator didn't have to enter our madness. *But enter it He did!*

Usually when people read the Christmas narrative they turn in their Bibles to Matthew or Luke, but the opening act of the story is actually found in Hebrews.

Hebrews 10:5-9 records the conversation Jesus had with the Father on the day He left heaven and entered our world. The Bible says of Jesus' departure...

“Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:

"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure.

Then I said, 'Behold, I have come - In the volume of the book it is written of Me - to do Your will, O God.' "

Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law), then (Jesus) said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." Jesus was born a *man on a mission*.

When the Lord said His good-byes in heaven He had an understanding of what awaited Him on earth. He knew that the wages of sin had always been death.

For centuries Jesus gazed down from His lofty perch in heaven, and watched the Jewish priests take sharp knives and slit the throats of innocent lambs.

God is spirit, and spirit has no blood. A spirit can neither cut, or bruise, or bleed. But Jesus saw the blood flow, and imagined what it would be like to bleed Himself. As we read, *“a body was prepared for Him.”*

From day one bleeding was in Jesus' future. Cold steel would open the tender skin of the manger baby.

By the time Jesus entered the world, God had tired of patchwork sacrifices. The blood of bulls, and lambs, and goats could only patch us up - *not make us new*.

At best the OT sacrifices earned us a parole.

But it took a sinless sacrifice to grant a permanent pardon. *And God's answer... a body made of tissue, and vulnerable to tearing, was prepared for His Son.*

As in America, Christmas in Japan has become a huge commercial success. Japanese shop and give gifts, yet few folks observe its religious significance.

One Christmas an American reporter was in Tokyo doing people-on-the-street interviews. He asked one young woman, "**What is the meaning of Christmas?**"

She started laughing because she had no idea.

When the interviewer pressed her for an answer, the lady finally said, "**Isn't that the day Jesus died?**"

Obviously, the lady's answer revealed her ignorance, but in a sense the Japanese woman was exactly right.

We know from our text that on the day Jesus left heaven He knew that one day cold, pointed nails would pierce the newborn flesh He now occupied. Jesus understood that a body had been prepared for Him.

And on the day of Jesus' departure from heaven He made a bold declaration of faith, "**Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.**" Come what may - *piercing steel, angry mobs, jealous Jews, even Roman crosses...* Jesus was all about doing the Father's will!

And Jesus had faith that once He'd done the will of God – God in turn, would raise Him up from the dead.

And that faith was exhibited the very second Jesus stepped out of the halls of heaven to come to earth.

This is why I say... [Christmas is about Faith.](#)

In 1940 a man named Clarence Jordan opened up *Koinonia Farm* in Americus, Georgia. He wanted a place to display racial unity and peaceful cooperation.

On Jordan's farm white people and black people lived and labored together in harmony and equality.

Later a new partner, Millard Fuller, would join Jordan at Koinonia Farm. After working there for several years Fuller would go on to start *Habitat for Humanity*.

In 1954 the Ku Klux Klan burned down every building on the farm. In the midst of the raid, Clarence heard a voice he recognized. Under one of the cowardly white hoods came the voice of a local newspaper reporter.

The next day that same reporter showed up to cover the story. He found Jordan in his fields planting seeds. He said, ["I heard the awful news of your tragedy last night, and I came out to cover the closing of your farm."](#)

Jordan just kept planting. The reporter continued to prod him for a response. Clarence just kept planting.

Finally, the bigoted, cowardly reporter scoffed at Clarence Jordan. ["You've got two PHDs... and you've put fourteen years into this farm... now there's nothing left. Just how successful do you think you've been?"](#)

At that comment, Jordan stopped his planting, and told him, “You just don’t get it, do you? You don’t understand us Christians. What we are about is not success, but **faithfulness...**” *This is what we learn from Jesus in the Christmas story. Our Lord was faithful.*

He stepped out of heaven to do the Father’s will.

Christmas is about faith...

A faith that doesn’t worry about the immediate consequences, but focuses on God’s will. True faith remains *faithful to the task – committed to the calling.*

It believes the will of God ultimately prevails.

Real faith can just as easily be called *obedience* - for faith and obedience go hand-in-hand! If I really trust God, I’ll do what He says... *and it really is that simple...*

This past week I watched a You Tube video labeled, “**A pastor recounts the stupidest thing he’s ever done.**”

After all the stupid stuff this pastor has done over the years, I was drawn to the video. *I’m not the only one!*

In the video Francis Chan tells his story...

One Sunday AM he brought a small balloon and a BB gun onto the platform. He taped the balloon to the curtain on the other end of the stage and asked his congregation how many of them believed he could shoot the balloon. 70% of the crowd raised their hand.

Then he said, “**How many of you will come on stage and hold the balloon, while I shoot it out of your hand?**”

Suddenly, the crowd of believers shrank to 20 or so.

That's when Chan said, "Alright, who's willing to hold the balloon between your teeth while I take my shot?" One man dared to put the balloon between his teeth.

Chan took aim. He said his original plan was to draw out the suspense, then stop, and congratulate the man for his faith without firing his BB gun. But once he was in position, he felt so comfortable, he pulled the trigger.

And thankfully, he hit the balloon.

Afterwards, he was swarmed with church staff and lawyers from the congregation who told him how stupid he'd been to put the church in such legal jeopardy.

I actually thought about bringing my BB gun and a balloon on stage this morning, but then I recalled the title of the video, "the stupidest thing I've ever done."

One of my New Year's Resolutions is to *avoid stupid*.

But you can't deny the difference of attitude between the 70% who believed Chan could shoot the balloon - and the one guy who was willing to hold it in his teeth.

We all agree we're saved, and grow, and please God *by faith*, but what constitutes true faith? Who are the true believers? *The people who sit around and talk about their trust in God, or the folks who act, and serve, and give, and initiate, and follow through, and really live like they believe the things God has said?*

*Did you know this is why **we** have been prepared a body? To do God's will! Romans 6:13 tells us, "present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God."* Your members include *your mind, your arms, your legs, your hands, your mouth...* your body parts.

You should look at your hands. Why are they there? Where did these complex clutch-ers originate?

Your hands, and feet, and eyes, and ears, and legs, and ligaments, and lungs are more than evolutionary adaptations. God gave you and I a body to *do* His will.

It amazes me the number of body-shaping strategies on the market today... There's "Body by Vi" where you substitute delicious meals for nasty-tasting shakes.

There's "Body by Boris" and "Body by Roy" - both exercise trainers... Then there's "Body by Roids" and "Body by Lazer" - substitutes for exercise trainers.

I remember the TV ads for "Body by Jake." Jake Steinfeld sold exercise equipment... Here's the latest "Body by..." T-shirt. "Body by video games" gets ugly.

Everybody wants to shape your body, but your body belongs to God. It was given to you by God. And He wants you to use it for one purpose - *to do His will*. The true Christmas spirit is a spirit of obedience and faith.

This is what we learn from a young Hebrew maiden named Mary. Here's a 14, 15 year-old girl engaged to be married. Like most girls her age her hopes and dreams were all mapped out. She and her Prince Charming would live happily ever after... *That's when news broke that irreversibly changed her life forever.*

An angel appeared to her with words of wonder.

He communicated a mysterious message, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."

Mary could've questioned God's will - or bucked at obedience – but she does neither. There's not *the slightest squirm* in Mary's response. As soon as God's will is revealed to her - she gives it all up - lays it all down - she surrenders her little girl hopes, and dreams, and plans, and ambitions to the good pleasure of God.

A body was prepared for Mary, and she unreservedly gave it to God. *And here's the application for us...* Are we as ready and willing to let God reverse our course, or upset our plan? Are we dedicated to His will or ours?

Most of you know this past year was monumental in our lives. In nine months, Kathy and I went from zero to four grandkids. It's like *ready or not here they come!*

I wasn't sure I was ready to be a granddad. I'm still recovering from [PPSD - post parenting stress disorder](#).

I haven't fully recovered from four teenagers.

Sometimes I wake up at night in a cold sweat reliving horrid scenes from my children's teenager years.

In fact, I have this reoccurring nightmare... Have you ever witnessed the meltdown that occurs when you tell a teenager that what he's planned for Friday night is not going to work out? *It's just not going to happen!*

Interfere with a teenager's Friday night plans, and it's like telling a normal, sane person that his right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness has been denied.

That teenager is ready to throw tea in the harbor and powder his muskets. He wants to revolt from the family.

But let me admit, as an adult, at times I act like a teenager. I've got plans I've cast in stone - *Friday night type plans*. And God the Father comes to me and says rather matter of fact... *often without even offering a explanation...* that what I've planned is just not going to happen. He has an alternate route for the path I'm on.

Seldom is my first reaction like Mary's!

Oh, I eventually surrender, but not until I've kicked, and bucked, and thrown a few cases of tea in the harbor. I revolt too often... *God help me! God help us!*

And there's a very simple reason why it's so hard for you and me to surrender our will to God... *we lack faith*.

Mary believed! She trusted God that His plan for her life was good, and best – even if it began with some pain, and involved some major inconveniences.

Mary was a teenager - *amazing!* And she accepted the detour to her plans as God's perfect will for her life.

Are we willing to be putty in the potter's hand?

Will we turn our family crest into a white flag?

Will we say to our living Lord what Mary said?

And I love Mary's words! In Luke 1:38 she responds to the angel's announcement, "*Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me, according to your word.*"

I don't know if a more beautiful and challenging statement of faith has ever fallen from human lips. "*Let it be to me, according to your word*" - this is faith!

Faith enough to surrender... Faith enough to use your body to do God's will... *Christmas is about faith.*

Christmas is a powerful lesson on faith. *The faith of Jesus - the faith of Mary - and too, the faith of Joseph.*

This man had no way to conceptualize and understand the miracle God had worked in the womb of his bride - but his faith went where his logic failed.

Joseph took Mary to be his wife even though it meant living with a host of unanswered questions.

Joseph is an amazing example of faith.

He teaches us that just because we have questions that we *can't* answer – and questions that God *won't* answer – that's no excuse to avoid doing God's will.

In the wake of the senseless school shooting in Sandy Hook, Connecticut all the news stations brought on pastors and clergy, and cornered them with the question, **“Where is God in these kinds of tragedies?”**

Of course, the bigger question should be, **“Why is it the only time we ever think of God is in the midst of tragedy?”** - *but we'll leave that issue for another day.*

Actually, the question being asked was, **“Why did an omnipotent God not stop the shooting?”** He could have. And the best answer to that question is very unsatisfying - **WE DON'T KNOW!** God doesn't tell us why... nor is He required to - God doesn't answer to us.

I did hear one pastor make a helpful comment. **“In the midst of tragedy some folks turn their back and run from God, but many more people sense the tragedy as an opportunity to turn to God and run toward Him.”**

This was Joseph's reaction. His grasp of God's will was fuzzy at best, yet He believed and ran to God.

Because of his faith, Mary's husband endured stares from a judgmental public. He bore the stigma of marrying an unwed mother. He had to flee to a foreign land. Joseph's faith was brave, selfless, sacrificial.

Think also of *the faith of the wise men*. Talk about faith prompting a person to action. Faith always sends us on a journey where change and surprise awaits us.

These men followed a star - *a transcendent point of light that shined brightly and never changed* - but they followed that star over rocky mountainous terrain, and through treacherous water, and across barren deserts.

That means their faith had to keep looking up.

They found the newborn King by never focusing on their earthly circumstances. Faith never takes its eyes off the fixed point of God's living and written Word.

This past week, Kathy and I watched a special edition of [Monica's Close-ups](#). Monica Pearson interviewed Dr. Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Atlanta.

Charles Stanley is a fellow I greatly respect.

He recently turned 80 years old, and he said in the interview the greatest advice he could give anyone was ["Obey God and leave all the consequences to Him."](#)

That's what Christmas is all about... [faith that follows though on God's will without worrying about the fallout.](#)

There's a scene in Dicken's classic novel, ["A Christmas Carol,"](#) where the Ghost of Christmas Past has just visited Ebenezer Scrooge. Obviously, the old miser is

shaken by his experience with the ghost, but when Scrooge wakes up he tries to shake it all off.

He dismisses what he was shown, “Bah, humbug, it wasn’t real.” He isn’t ready to take the message seriously. And I love the words Dickens puts into the mouth of Scrooge. “Just a bit of last night’s undigested beef... there is more gravy about you than grave.”

Scrooge tries to write off his encounter with the ghost as a simple case of indigestion... And I’m afraid this is how some people respond to the Christmas story.

Christmas is about faith... yet how many of us take heed to the message? We open our presents, and pick fruit cake from between our teeth, and mourn over the credit card bills - but do we ponder the point of it all?

Every Christian should roar out of the Christmas season and charge into the New Year with *a faith on fire* – with a renewed commitment to do the will of God.

Our Lord Jesus, and Mary, and Joseph, and the wise men - all inspire us to behave according to our belief.

This Christmas don’t just burp on your eggnog... and trip over the bows and wrapping paper... and fight the heartburn of too much turkey and dressing...

For Christmas sake, think of ways that God wants you to put your faith into action.
Christmas is about faith... courageous, adventurous, obedient faith.

Roy Hattersley is a British journalist. He’s also an atheist - in fact, a very outspoken atheist. But in September 2005, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Hattersley

wrote a column for the British newspaper, “The Guardian.” He titled it, “Faith Does Breed Charity.”

Hattersley had watched the Salvation Army and other Christian groups come to the rescue of the Gulf Coast residents, and he was impressed. He admired the Christian’s selflessness, and their acts of daring.

In his article, Hattersley admits that Christianity embeds a moral imperative in its followers that atheism does not. Hattersley wrote, “We atheists have to accept that most believers are better human beings.”

Christians are the folks most willing to act in a crisis.

Hattersley commented, “It ought to be possible to live a Christian life without being a Christian... yet men and women who, like me, cannot accept the mysteries and the miracles do not go out with the Salvation Army at night.” He realized that folks find a courage and caring in Christianity that they don’t find elsewhere.

Again, Hattersley was speaking of the Gulf Coast relief work when he observed... “Notable by their absence were teams from rationalist societies, free thinkers’ clubs, and atheists’ associations - the sort of people who scoff at religion’s intellectual absurdity.

Christians are the people most likely to take the risks and make the sacrifices involved in helping others.”

And why might that be? Why are Christians the people willing to dive into helping other people out of their mess and despair? Why are we the dumpster divers? I have the answer... It’s because of Christmas!

We learn from Christmas that we follow *a dumpster diving God*. Christmas is all about courageous faith. Jesus braved a cold, cruel world to retrieve us to God!

On December 24, 1989 a Romanian church was celebrating Christmas Eve by candlelight. During the service Communist soldiers came to arrest the pastor.

As the soldiers approached the church, members started lining up outside. First 10 people deep - then 20, then 30. Church members encircled the building.

Soldiers couldn't break through the human shield.

It was a symbolic moment - one of the triggers that brought down the Romanian dictatorship. And it was inspired, by the courage we find in the Christmas story!

Some people say that the celebration of Christmas really doesn't belong on December 25th. Four days into winter it's too cold for shepherds to be tending their flocks at night in the fields outside of Bethlehem.

Neither was wintertime the season for a census. Who wants to take a long trip in cold, rainy weather?

Caesar ordered such decrees in the spring or fall.

It's true, Jesus was probably born in late summer or early autumn... *But that's not to say that Christmas doesn't belong on December 25!* I think its positioning on the calendar is perfect. What better time to recall *Christmas Day* than one week before *New Year's Day*.

This coming New Year seems particularly perilous...

Our country's economy is sliding off a fiscal cliff towards a new recession... across the Middle East the Arab spring has turned into a winter nightmare...

Super-storms and school massacres haunt us... All kinds of problems face us in this coming new year.

And that's not to mention the personal, and financial, and spiritual challenges that you and yours face.

To me, this is why it's so appropriate that Christmas comes one week before the New Year. It gives us seven days to ponder the brave, courageous faith of *Jesus' descent into this world... and Mary's surrender to God's will... and Joseph's obedience even with questions swirling in his head... and the wise men's trek into the unexpected...* all examples of real faith!

For this is the faith it takes to live in a broken world.

When the four embassy officials were shot in Libya it didn't really effect us - *not enough to keep us up at night*. Libya is too far - in a unstable part of the world.

But when the sanctity of a kindergarten classroom in Sandy Hook was violated by a mad gunman... teachers were shot... as were blonde-haired girls learning to read... and playful little boys... all of a sudden evil was not that far away. We're not safe in our own backyard.

In fact, the gunman looked like the kid next door.

We were all reminded that no matter how hard we try life in a fallen world is not something you or I can control. It takes courage to get up and face a new day.

There's a quote I like. It gets attributed to Teddy Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, John Wooden... Perhaps all three men said it, for it's true... **"Success is never final, failure is never fatal. It is courage that counts."**

This is what we need heading into the New Year - a Christmas-style courage! We need a *dumpster-diving, obedience-inspiring, Bethlehem-arriving* type bravery...

A faith that does the will of God regardless...

You and I need the courage that rises up in the midst of the brokenness around us, and fixes what we can.

I read a blog this week that stated, "If we learn anything from the Christmas story let it be courage..."

Christmas is a feast day for the stout of heart.

It's a call not just to bake cookies and sip cider, but to be strong, to proclaim our faith more boldly, and to make real sacrifices for our relationship with God..."

An all-wise God will one day *mend all that's broken and restore all that's fallen*. But for the moment He allows the wreckage to remain, and expects us to have the courage to obey *His Word* and answer *His call*.

Christmas is about family.

Christmas is about worship.

And Christmas is about faith.

This morning I want to give you an opportunity to begin this New Year with an expression of faith.

I'd like to invite us all to the altar... I want to pray for everyone that God would give us courageous faith - *faith to do God's will despite the consequences...*