

WHAT CHRISTMAS IS ALL ABOUT

CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT CONNECTIONS

HEBREWS 1:1-2

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...

Christmas is a time for friends and family. It's an opportunity to gather around a warm fireplace - or a festive tree - or a table full of delicious food - and be with people you love. But what happens if you're too far away, or just too busy to sit down with everyone?

Well, you send them a Christmas card! One of my favorite Christmas traditions is Christmas cards!

In Christmas' past, when we received a card Kathy would read it; then place it over a slat in the living room blinds. As the season progressed the slats filled up with cards. Then a few days before Christmas I'd plop down in my recliner and read the cards in one sitting.

And I thoroughly enjoyed my Christmas ritual!

Reading a Christmas card, especially one with a personalized note, is the next best thing to sitting with its sender, and enjoying some Christmas cheer.

And I'm not the only person who enjoys Christmas cards. You'd think in an age of email, and texting, and messaging Christmas cards sent snail mail would be outdated - a relic of the past... The US Postal Service tells us that the overall quantity of physical mail has decreased in recent years by

43%, but bucking that trend are Christmas cards. Americans still send 1.6 billion cards each holiday season. Hallmark markets over 2000 different Christmas card designs. Americans spend \$2 billion a year on greeting cards at Christmas.

For me, I look forward to Christmas cards almost as much as I do Christmas gifts. A gift is usually an object, but a card conveys a message... A gift you plug in, or put on - but a card encourages, instructs, or inspires.

A Christmas card makes me think and ponder.

It reminds me of a facet of the holiday I may've forgotten or neglected. You could make the case, that cards are more heartfelt and spiritually-oriented than gifts. And after saying that, my family will probably take back any gifts they've bought me, and swap them for cheaper cards... but I do like Christmas cards...

And this year I'm going to give each of you four Christmas cards... I'd prefer to sit with you in your home, around your Christmas tree, sip some eggnog, and discuss what's on our hearts. But unfortunately, there's not enough time, or enough me to go around...

But here's what I can do... Each week from now until the end of the year you'll get a different Christmas card when you walk into church. It'll be a reminder of that week's sermon. Over our next four meetings I'll be discussing the theme: **what Christmas is all about.**

Today's message is **Christmas is about Connections**. Next Sunday's study is **Christmas is about Family**. On Christmas Eve we'll discuss, **Christmas is about Worship**. And the Sunday after Christmas, I'll speak on **Christmas is about Faith**.

Hopefully, you'll get some inspiration from these messages, and you can use your Christmas cards to jot down the ideas you think are worthy to remember.

Then when you go home, hang your card on your blinds, or in the Christmas tree, along with the three to come, and read them again this holiday season.

Once more, here's the theme for our next four gatherings: **what Christmas is all about!** And today, I want us to realize... **Christmas is about Connections**.

Hebrews 1:1-2, declares a monumental truth, **"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son..."** No wonder Christmas cards, and the act of conveying a message, are so synonymous with the spirit of Christmas. The God who authored the Christmas story is the God who speaks.

Hebrews tells us, **"At various times and in various ways"** God has spoken. The God who exists is far from silent. Our Creator doesn't suffer from lockjaw. The word of God has penetrated time and space, and has declared His will to man. God hasn't left us in the dark. He hasn't sentenced us to figure life out on our own.

Once agnostic philosopher, Christopher Morley, wrote, “My theology, briefly, is that the universe was dictated, but not signed.” In other words, God exists, but remains incognito. God refuses to play his cards.

He’s saying God doesn’t bother to send Christmas cards. He prefers distance. He stays mum and mute.

I’ve heard it said, “The atheist refuses to believe God exists. The agnostic refuses to believe God speaks. But the Bible assures us, “God is and He has spoken.”

The first verse of Hebrews in a Greek Bible uses the terms “**polumeros**” and “**polutropos**” - that God has spoken in **many portions** and through **many methods**.

In the Hebrew Old Testament, written to God’s people in the past, His revelation unfolded over the centuries. God spoke through many mouths, and by many means. He spoke bit by bit - piece by piece - a portion here, a portion there - here a word, there a word. Theologians call this **progressive revelation**. It was as if God was unrolling a scroll a little at a time.

Each of the Hebrew prophets penned a successive line in God’s unfolding drama... **Isaiah spoke of the salvation of the Lord. Jeremiah emphasized the judgment of the Lord. Ezekiel described the glory of the Lord. Daniel assured us of the sovereignty of the Lord. Hosea put on display the love of the Lord. And Zechariah highlighted the faithfulness of the Lord.**

Various prophets gave us a portion, but no one prophet provided a full and comprehensive portrait of God’s will for man. God spoke piecemeal. He revealed Himself in many portions, but also in many ways...

The Hebrew prophets were also versatile in their deliveries. Some preached - others acted out object lessons - or did miracles - or interpreted dreams...

The Prophet Isaiah walked naked and barefoot for three years to warn the Egyptians that God would send foreign invaders to bring judgment upon them.

God's Prophet Hosea was told to marry a prostitute to illustrate how He felt about Israel's unfaithfulness.

God sent the Prophet Jeremiah to the river to bury a linen sash. After enough time had elapsed for it to rot, Jeremiah went back and dug it up. He used it as a visual to remind the Jews of their spiritual rottenness.

And of all the Hebrew prophets, Ezekiel was the most famous for acting out symbolic gestures. I like to call him **"the stuntman of the Bible."** Once, Ezekiel laid on his side for over a year... At another time, he put his face to a frying pan... He shaved his head with a sword... He cut his hair into three clumps... All his antics spoke messages God wanted communicated.

Ezekiel was even told to cook his food over cow chips... And I'm sure when he got to heaven the first thing God told him was, **"Well dung, good and faithful servant."** (just a joke) But here's my point, **"in times past God spoke in many portions and in many ways..."**

And yet these Old Testament revelations had their limitations. Scattered messages can be hard to synchronize. Bits and pieces don't always fit together.

After the last prophet had uttered his message there were people who still didn't understand God's heart!

When a prophet spoke of God's might Israel would forget His mercy... When he emphasized God's love Israel forgot about His wrath... When a prophet spoke of God's glory Israel would fail to see His gentleness...

When the prophets communicated to God's people, they heard the immediate message spoken, but they failed to put it all together. God's revelation was like a jigsaw puzzle - pieces were scattered all over the table top - but there was no sense of the complete picture.

The challenge for God was to find a way to connect all He had spoken. God needed to encapsulate all that He had said into one message... to roll up the divine will into a single revelation... And God rose to the challenge in a brilliant way. Hebrews tells us the God who **“spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...”**

The child that was born to Mary and laid in a manger was God's full and final word to man. **“Today, there's nothing more to be said. There's nothing that's been left unsaid. It's all been said in Jesus Christ.”**

God expressed His genius in the miracle we call **“Christmas.”** For the best way to communicate a message is not to break it down and send it out in portions - **but to send the messenger Himself.** Jesus Christ was the embodiment of all God's ways and will.

Jesus' words were always integrated with His actions. You not only saw His deeds, you heard His heart. You not only heard His heart, you saw His deeds. Jesus delivered God's words and performed God's work, and there was never a confusing disparity between the two. He gave us a full revelation of God.

This is what we're told in John 1:18, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him."

If you want to know what God is like - and what He likes - watch Jesus. Today, God declares His message, and expresses His heart, and conveys His words to us, and reveals His will for us through His Son. Jesus is the ultimate Christmas card from God to mankind.

And there's not a person in this room who doesn't desire for God to speak to them. You wouldn't be here if you didn't. Yet perhaps you're looking for God to speak to us like He did to Moses at the burning bush, or Elijah in the cave, or even like Ezra preaching from the steps of the Temple... We're looking for God to communicate in many portions and in many ways...

But that's not how God speaks in these last days.

If you want to hear God speak loud and clear, tune in to Jesus. In Christ all the truths of God connect and fit together. That's why Christmas is about connections.

A convergence took place that first Christmas. Everything in the plan and will of God came together.

Five connections occurred...

Between past and present
Between east and west
Between young and old
Between mundane and miracle
Between heaven and earth

God's plan for all people, and all ages came together that first Christmas. **Christmas is about Connections.** It's the time of the year when we connect the dots.

And with the time I have left I want to talk about how this happened at the birth of Christ, and then I want to apply these same connections to our lives today.

First, **Christmas is a connection between the past and the present.** Do a quick reading of Matthew's Gospel, and you'll immediately notice all the Old Testament references. Chapter 1:23 quotes Isaiah 7:14, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." Chapter 2:5 quotes Micah 5:2, "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel."

That Messiah would be born of a virgin... That He would be born in a tiny town called Bethlehem... both were facts foretold long before their actual occurrence.

And a host of other prophecies were fulfilled in the events of Jesus' birth. Later Matthew again quotes from Hosea and Jeremiah. After reading the Gospels you'd think the Old Testament was a fill-in-the-blank quiz, and "**Jesus**" is the answer to all the questions.

Jesus was the final stanza to the song the prophets had been singing for centuries. The hope of the Old Testament saints was fulfilled in Jesus. When the holy child was born a long, cold night ended - and the first rays of a new day dawned. A grim past gave way to an exciting present, and a still more hopeful future.

This is what prompted a 6th century monk, Dionysius, to split our calendar into A.D. ([Anno Domini](#), which is Latin “[in the year of our Lord](#)”) and B.C. ([before Christ](#)).

Dionysius recognized the first Christmas as the connection between what had been spoiled by man’s sin, and the beginnings of God's promised redemption.

But [Christmas is also a connection between east and west](#). About the time Jesus was born a star appeared in the eastern skies over Babylon. There, a few soothsayers and astrologers saw the astronomical marvel, and took notice. These wise men were eastern mystics - shamans - Persian dalai-lamas. Yet they had been influenced by men familiar with the Hebrew God.

As far back as Moses, 1,445 years earlier, an earlier Persian wise guy named Balaam uttered a God-given prophecy. His words are recorded in Numbers 24:17, “[I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel...](#)” Balaam associated the appearance of a star with the coming of a Scepter, or ruler, out of Israel.

A closer contemporary to the wise men of that first Christmas was Daniel. He had also influenced the dignitaries

who visited Jesus. In Daniel 9, the Hebrew prophet predicted the very day the Jewish King would appear to the nation Israel. From Daniel's prophecy the magi could calculate Jesus' approximate time of arrival.

Both Daniel and Balaam primed the pump. They sensitized these eastern wizards to be looking westward for a sign the Savior of the world was born.

And what a sight it was when this caravan from the east rode into Jerusalem looking for the newborn King.

These were oriental officials riding into an occidental city. East is meeting West - Gentiles are visiting Jews.

These wise men looked and dressed strangely. Their mere appearance frightened the Jewish King Herod.

And though the Jewish scholars in Jerusalem knew from the Scriptures exactly where the promised king had been born they refused to join the caravan.

They were only a few miles from Messiah who'd been born to die, and first for the Jews... yet they and their brothers were too proud to come and worship. A reception for the newborn King was left up to Gentiles.

Even as a baby Jesus reached across a continent. He connected lost people a world away, to God's promises. As an infant, Jesus began His work of connecting the disconnected, and of reuniting people.

And speaking of bringing folks together... **Christmas connects young people with older people.** Recall Mary's encounter with Anna and Simeon in the Temple.

Mary was a teenager. Anna and Simeon were senior citizens. It was said of Anna, “[She was of a great age.](#)” We’re told it had been 91 years since she was married.

According to Jewish Law the earliest a girl could marry was 13. That meant Anna was at least 104 years old. She’d been on social security for over 40 years.

And neither was Ole Simeon a spring chicken. He too was a seasoned saint. Remember, the Holy Spirit had assured him that he wouldn’t kick the bucket until he had seen the Messiah. I picture Simeon’s normally failing arms and quivering hands growing strong one last time when he reached to Mary for the baby Jesus.

What a moment in the Temple - two old-timers and a teenage mom bonded over the baby in their arms.

And the Christmas scene that always stuns me occurs when the wise men finally arrive in Bethlehem.

By this time the child is a toddler. Jesus was maybe two years old... Imagine, these distinguished oriental dignitaries - adult men - polished gentlemen - bowing before a rambunctious toddler. [Age yielded to origin.](#)

Certainly, Christmas connects young and old.

And [Christmas connects the mundane with the miraculous.](#) Picture the nativity scene... the holy moment... the miracle of all miracles has taken place.

Try to imagine what it all meant... God took on fragile flesh. The Divine came into the world with a spleen, a liver, and two kidneys. The Almighty had adenoids... and when He

appeared Joseph laid Him in a manger... Martin Luther remarked of His birth, “The mystery of the humanity of Christ, that He sunk Himself into our flesh, is beyond all human understanding.”

Yet as miraculous as this all was, its surroundings were every bit as monotonous and messy. Remember, this was a stable, not a maternity ward. Cows were mooing, sheep bleating, dogs barking, chickens clucking. It was a place as earthy as earth can get.

And recall what brought the couple to Bethlehem in the first place. The location of the Child-birth had been foretold by Micah the prophet, 700 years earlier.

Yet I doubt seriously if that biblical detail ever crossed Joseph’s mind as he loaded a pregnant Mary on the back of a burro for a three day donkey ride.

As they walked the dusty, dirt roads down the Jordan Valley, Joseph may’ve cursed the blasted tyrant in Rome who had ordered such a senseless census... I can hear him mutter, “Isn’t it enough that Augustus rules the world? Why does that power-hungry emperor have to brag about the number of his subjects?”

Yet God was using something as typically earthly as a Caesar’s inflated ego to fulfill His divine, eternal will.

How’s that for merging the mundane with the miraculous? Again, Christmas is a time to plot the dots. Christmas connects the run-of-the-mill with God’s will.

And most importantly, **Christmas connects heaven with earth**. Remember the star the wise men followed to the house in Bethlehem where Joseph and Mary were rearing Jesus. It's possible this star was a celestial phenomenon, maybe an alignment of planets. Or it could've been a physical manifestation of God's glory... But whatever it was I know it was a big deal.

It reminds me of the hubbub a few years back over a near fly-by of Halley's Comet. One curious star-gazer traveled to the Inca Ruins of Peru to get the best view.

After the comet had passed this particular lady was quoted as saying, **"That's it? That's all there is? I came 4000 miles to see this crummy little fuzzball?"** She was obviously disappointed. But no one reacted that way to the star the wise men saw. It was a very big deal.

The star God put in the sky was a signal to those who noticed, **that heaven had come to earth**. The eternal had mingled with time. God was now dabbling in the affairs of man. A divine visitation had occurred.

Think too of what happened in the shepherd's fields. Dirty, grimy shepherds are trying to keep warm by a fire. They smell like sheep and soot. They're telling jokes... killing time... another night on a boring job...

When suddenly, the skies peel a part - a warp in the space-time continuum occurs over the fields outside Bethlehem - a curtain rises between time and eternity.

Shepherds use to seeing sheep in the moonlight are blinking their eyes in the blinding light of God's glory. A host of angels, Luke calculates **"a multitude"** - suddenly appear over

the shepherds saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

How odd is this... The hallowed angels meet hairy shepherds. Messengers of the Almighty share the same space as moisture droplets and flying bugs. A collision of the physical and spiritual, the eternal and the seasonal occur above the shepherd’s fields. Heaven is working on earth... God is coming to man!

And this is why I say **Christmas is about Connections**. On that first Christmas, God connected the dots - an intriguing convergence took place...

Between past and present

Between east and west

Between young and old

Between mundane and miracle

Between heaven and earth

And here’s our application, two-thousand years later, God makes sure **Christmas is still about connections**.

Every Christmas draws a line connecting **past and present, east and west, young and old, mundane and miracle, and heaven and earth**. Christmas is still the time of year when God connects the dots of our life.

Think of it, **Christmas still connects past and present**. Unlike other holidays, Christmas time stirs up memories from all my past Christmases. And I’m sure having just lost my dad, I’ll even do more reminiscing this Christmas. Christmas is a time of recollection.

I always recall the year my little brother got sick, and every time I turned on my battery operated Godzilla he would scream with fright and run to mom. I tortured him all Christmas. It's a wonder he speaks to me today.

And it seems like just yesterday, that I was standing in my neighbor's yard in front of his outdoor nativity. I was holding my daughter, Natalie. She was just 5 or 6 years old, and we were admiring the baby Jesus in the manger. We talked of how much we both loved Him.

Christmas stirs up past memories... some pleasant, some painful... But the holiday connects the present with the past. We recall people we miss. At Christmas we tend to take inventory of how far God has brought us, and count the blessings we've been given to enjoy.

Christmas also still connects east and west, or for us north and south. For if Christmas is truly understood it brings people together. When God entered this divided world He did so as a baby, for a baby disarms pride, and prejudice, and racial bigotry.

Who can deny a baby love and attention? Who cares if it's a yellow baby, or a black baby, or a white baby, or a red baby... a baby is the picture of innocence and purity. A baby defies stereotypes and characterizations. Babies aren't associated with a class or cause. A baby is first and foremost human. Who doesn't love a baby?

And a baby can wiggle its way into a callous heart as nothing else can... Recently, I spoke with an interracial couple who were initially rejected by the wife's mother.

Whenever they were together, Mom's disapproval was palpable. That is until their baby came along. It was their baby that melted Mom's heart. She so loved that baby, how could she reject his mom and dad?

If you saw an African, or Caucasian, or Asian adult in need and on the street, you may or may not pass by them. But if you saw an unattended baby in a basket beside the road, it wouldn't matter the color of that baby's skin, everybody would surely stop to help him.

And Christmas still prompts this type of connection.

Christmas draws us all to the baby in the manger. In coming as a baby God slipped past our prejudices. He humbled Himself to appeal to everyone, everywhere.

And when you embrace Jesus as your Lord you lock hearts with everyone else who worships Him.

And **Christmas still connects young and old**. For it doesn't matter how old I get, Christmas Eve and Christmas morning are still magical times for me.

Remember how a teenage Mary **"kept all these things and pondered them in her heart."** And how the old geezer, Simeon, uttered his praise, **"Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel..."** And then the elderly, Anna, who gave **"thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem."** Hey, young and old alike were caught up in the wonders of that first Christmas.

Christmas is a holiday that's equally enjoyed by every age. My wife gets as excited about decorating our tree - as does

our grandkids. I get the same thrill from giving gifts, as I use to get from receiving them.

Christmas is better than a drink from the fountain of youth. Everybody gets younger at Christmas time.

And **Christmas still connects the mundane and the miraculous**. Don't miss the subtle miracles at Christmas... Ever notice how even the hardest, most bitter hearts tend to soften at this special time of year?

Folks usually closed to the Gospel are more likely to consider Jesus. And God might want to arrange an opportunity or two for you to reach out to a suddenly, even surprisingly, receptive person this Christmas!

In fact, all year long, but especially at Christmas time we should be on the lookout for God to arrange for us divine appointments... God can bring a person in need across your path... Or an old friend might contact you... Or you could receive an unexpected text...

It was no accident the Caesar issued his census when he did. God used a pompous dictator to move Joseph and Mary from their hometown to Messiah's predicted birthplace. And God has ways to engineer you, into position where He can use you or bless you!

And lastly, but again most importantly, **Christmas still connects heaven and earth**. God still puts stars in the night-sky to guide hearts who seek to worship His Son. Christmas is all about heaven breaking through to earth - God intervening in human affairs.

Christmas proved that God doesn't sit in the heavens with folded arms, expecting us to work it out on our own. God jumps into our muck and mire. And He comes subtly, humbly, unpretentiously... as a baby.

The wise men were looking for God to provide a sign... Anna and Simeon patiently waited for God to fulfill a promise... Mary and Joseph had courageously obeyed and were now trusting God with their welfare...

What are you looking for God to do? Whatever that might be, Christmas heightens our expectations. It reminds us that Jesus invades stables, and offices, and homes with His miracles. He still wants to birth new life in a world where death haunts us. Jesus loves to light up our nights with glory, and fill the atmosphere of our lives with the sweet aroma of His grace.

Here's my suggestion for you and me, [look for the connections God wants to make this Christmas!](#)

God loves to connect the dots. On their own the bits and pieces of our life can seem random, but Jesus makes sense of our lives! We look back on our circumstances and wonder why, but when we bow to worship Jesus, when He invades our lives, Jesus connects us to God and connects us to each other.

Christmas connects the present with the past. It recalls past promises, and restores hope... Christmas connects us to people different from ourselves. It's a celebration of the whole of God's family... Christmas causes us to grow younger and renew a child-like faith... Christmas is a time to look for miracles even in the midst of the mundane... And Christmas teaches us that God has spoken through His Son. Heaven continues to invade earth through the Spirit of Jesus.

Jesus is the most well-connected person I know!

Christmas is about Connections! And here's my final thought... how about you, are you connected to Jesus?