

"Time Out! . . . To Confess"—Luke 2:16-17

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, "Time Out! . . . To Confess", is Luke 2:16-17 → *The shepherds went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Tonight and tomorrow the majority of the people in our communities across this nation will take "time out" from work and the usual activities of life to gather with family and friends. Why? Well, the answer is obvious: to celebrate Christmas, the birth of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world! . . . or is it that obvious?

Think of how Christmas is viewed in our culture:

- ① For many it's meaning is found in romance as you discover your true love at this "romantic" time of year. This is the essence of many Christmas movies and is expressed by many who wonder if "he'll pop the question" so my son, daughter, friend or whomever will finally get engaged.

- ② Think of how Christmas has become the time for so many to “confess” a “belief” in a mythological person who has been given god-like qualities named Santa Claus. Many think he personifies this celebration.
- ③ Many define Christmas as a time of peace, love and joy. The real celebration is basking in the “spirit” of the holiday season by being more generous, kind, happy and so forth. Can’t you see it on everyone’s faces during the holiday season?
- ④ It seems to be a time of year with it’s own music as well. “Christmas carols” are being sung by all kinds of people with all kinds of messages related to the “spirit of Christmas” that makes one wonder if they’re being sung in faith or just “ritual.” I even heard “Joy to the World” playing in a store the other day. I wasn’t sure what “Jeremiah was a bull frog” who had some “mighty fine wine” had to do with Christmas. However, since this song from the 1970's is entitled “Joy to the World” it must certainly be a Christmas song, not?
- ⑤ For many Christmas is about materialism with an indulgence in more and more stuff which taxes not just the pocketbook but also one’s emotional and psychological health. We are made to wonder if businesses could even exist without celebrating Christmas!

Face it: The preparations for and celebrating of this event we call

“Christmas” many times can turn into an activity of keeping up expected traditions without recognizing the proper meaning for it’s purpose—taking time out to confess Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Even we Christians can find ourselves “wrapped up” in “the holiday season” with all kinds of reasons for doing what we do and forget about confessing it’s proper meaning. So . . . what are you actually **confessing** in all of your traditions and celebrations connected to Christmas?

Our text records the celebration of the shepherds on the night that Jesus was born. They got to take part in the original Christmas! Verse 16 says they *went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger* just like the angel had told them. As they took “time out” to reflect on the meaning of Christmas for them they also took “time out” to **confess** its proper meaning to others!

Verse 17 of our text says these shepherds *made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child*. Naturally they would have to explain what they were doing at this place since they were unknown to Mary and Joseph. Usually family and friends join a couple to celebrate the birth of a baby, not strangers! They confessed what the angel had told them in Luke 2:11 → This child is a *Savior* for all people, *Who is Christ the Lord*.

The word which these shepherds spread about this Child went much

deeper than information about a “holiday season.” It was an expression of **their faith** in this Child as God’s long-promised Messiah Whom He sent to save sinners from eternal death in hell because of their sin. The coming of Jesus as the Babe in Bethlehem does not have meaning until He comes into your heart through faith. (cf. Ephesians 1:16-17) When you recognize your sins, confess them and trust in Jesus’ death for the forgiveness of your sins, then you will have a proper desire to celebrate Christmas focused on a *Savior, Who is Christ your Lord!*

When **relationship** to Jesus Christ is most important, not simply a relationship to His birth or a traditional “holiday” connected to His birth, then Christmas traditions and celebrations will involve spreading the word concerning what has been told you about this Child. That’s why we have gathered here tonight. We focus on the real meaning of Christmas as evidenced by sharing our faith in Jesus Christ with people not only during this “holiday season” but everyday of the year.

Christmas . . . the holiday season . . . yuletide . . . whatever you want to call it . . . is actually an opportunity to take “time out” to confess the Lordship of Jesus that you confess everyday of the year. Such a confession is not bound to a season, event or place, such as in a church building at a Christmas Eve worship service. While this season may provide more open doors to take

time out to confess Jesus as the Savior from sin in the midst of so many traditions and celebrations, the Holy Spirit brings forth this confession because Jesus is Lord of your life. When your preparations and celebrating are guided by a faith relationship with Jesus Christ then you will be confessing Jesus. The Holy Spirit can work through this Gospel that you spread and others can be eternally blessed by the message behind the celebrations! **We must never underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word of the Gospel in our Christmas confession of faith in it's various forms!**

Here is one example of a Jewish man who heard the *good news of great joy . . . for all the people* (cf. Luke 2:10) in the midst of the holiday traditions in our culture, through which the Holy Spirit created faith in Jesus and a whole new celebration of Christmas!

The first time I recall hearing "O Come O Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel" was during my fourth grade "holiday" concert at Captain Grey elementary school in Pasco, Washington. I remember singing soprano and having to learn the words about the birth of the Christ child. But I was Jewish, so it was just a song . . . even if Israel was mentioned.

My next memories were during my junior and senior high school days. We had a family-run jewelry business, and I worked in the store during the busy "holiday" shopping season. Of course,

appropriate music filtered through the store. But I was Jewish, so what did these songs have to do with rejoicing? Besides, Christmas was not our holiday, it was theirs—the Christians.

My next recollection was after I graduated from college. Jan was then my fiancé, and her family had invited us to visit for the holidays, which were just two months before our wedding. How could I say “No” to joining them for their Christmas eve candlelight service? Again the refrain entered my ears: “O Come O Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel.” *But this was for the gentiles, and I was Jewish—so it was not for me.* After all, didn’t we have the Jewish form of Christmas—Hanukkah—where we exchanged gifts for eight nights instead of one as the Christians did?

The Maccabees didn’t need a ransom; they took matters into their own hands and set captive Israel free. Don’t we light candles for eight nights and eat potato latkes (pancakes) fried in oil to remind us of the miracle of the oil that stayed lit for eight nights though the quantity was sufficient for only one night?

Isn’t that the way we ought to live today? It’s the American way . . . go for the gold with all the gusto we can muster and succeed, succeed, succeed. Who needs a ransom, anyway?

Then God started answering the prayers of a close friend of mine who wanted me to believe in Jesus. He prayed that I would do

something I had avoided all those years: investigate for myself those claims that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah of Israel.

In the fall of 1973, I purchased a Bible with the New Testament at a garage sale for \$3.00. I quietly started reading the first book of the New Testament, Matthew, not knowing what to expect . . . Christmas trees? Santa Clauses? Easter Bunnies? Church steeples?

What I discovered was a genealogy of Jewish names: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; Joseph and King David . . . all leading to the person of Y'shua—Jesus.

I will never forget my first thought, "What are our guys doing in their book?" As I read on, I discovered the reality that Jesus is Jewish, the first followers of Jesus were Jewish, they worshiped at the Temple and studied in the synagogues. They celebrated Passover and the only mention of Hanukkah in the Bible is when the Jewish leadership questions the Messiahship of Jesus at the Temple during the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22-31). This is Jewish! So why are so many gentiles following the Jewish Messiah?

Then it came back to me: "and ransom captive Israel." The real problem was not a question of Jewishness . . . but we are sinful, and separated from God because of our sin. *We are indeed captive and in need of being ransomed.*

I confessed Jesus as my Messiah on December 23rd, 1973. The

next night I went with Jan to a service where once again the refrain sounded in my ears. But this time it was *much* different. I knew that the ransom of captive Israel was accomplished through the Messiah who was born and lived without sin . . . just as God had long before promised in the Scriptures. So now it all makes sense: Christmas, celebrating the birth of the one who ransomed us all, is indeed a Jewish holiday. It is best celebrated not by presents under a tree, but through His presence in our hearts and lives. *Rejoice, Rejoice Emmanuel HAS come to Israel!* (“Christmas—A Jewish Holiday??” by Steve Cohen (Founder of *the Apple of His Eye Mission Society*) From the December 1997 edition of *the Apple of His Eye Mission Society* Newsletter.)

Your confessing the good tidings of great joy in Christ through your Christmas celebrations are powerful! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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