

Spc131 – Experience Christ at Christmas Matthew 1:23  
*Pastor Dave Shepardson Calvary Chapel Nuevo / [www.wordbymail.com](http://www.wordbymail.com)*

Open your Bibles. We're going to do an Advent message. **Advent** means “coming.” Traditionally churches have Advent messages that lead up to Christmas. Today I have a really important Advent message for you, and my only goal today is to encourage you.

Christmas is upon us – it's that time of year again. Christmas... with all things “Christmas.” Stress. Money issues. Busyness. Commitments. You know, all the things that make up Christmas. We just too easily fall right into the cultural norm of stress, and money needs and busyness – not by choice – but by default, don't we? Sometimes it feels like the world is dictating our focus and efforts, because it often is.

We are going to Matthew 1:23 today. And so I have one very simple goal today. My prayer for us is that we would each (personally) make the time and put in the effort to truly experience Christ this Christmas. Sounds easy enough, doesn't it? That it is until the world redirects your focus.

*Let's pray. Lord, Jesus, we want to break through what on the surface is about you but is so much not about you. Lord, what it is in name, yours, you own it, but in action and in feeling and in activity and stress levels it is so much not who you are in our lives. Help us to discern the difference and give us this motivation as Christmas rushes upon us. Give us the commitment to make the time and to put in the effort to make sure that we experience you personally in this Christmas season. That we know you better in this Christmas season. That we have time of intimate relationship and communion with you during this Christmas season. Give us that today, please, encourage us and exhort us to meet you in this season. We pray for your glory in our lives and in your name, amen.*

The gift we truly need in this Christmas season – in every Christmas season – is Immanuel. God With Us.

**Matthew 1:23 (NLT)**

***23 “Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’ ”***

We NEED what Jesus Christ came to actually BE – GOD WITH US. And more specifically we need to *experience* Jesus *being* who he came to be, which is God With Us.

We need to EXPERIENCE his presence.

We need to COMMUNE with him.

We need to HEAR from him.

We need to WORSHIP him.

We as a church culture often have way too much information and way too little experience.

Many of us know *about* Jesus. We even know *about* the need to keep the focus on Jesus in this crazy holiday time. We might even know about the *need* to be spending time *with him* during the Christmas season.

And yet often we don't. We would, but there just isn't time. You know, it's Christmas season, I just don't really have time to spend with Jesus.

Now please hear me. I'm not trying to make you feel bad. I'm not sending you on a guilt trip. I am just encouraging you.

We are called to be Christ followers, not church "attenders." People who actually follow Christ every day of the week. And the only way you can do that is to have a daily, real, personal relationship with him. And my prayer is that you would be inspired by the Holy Spirit to make sure that every day we say, "What about you Jesus? What about you personally? What would you say to me personally? How can I get with you today? How can I meet you, where can I go to block out the hecticness that is Christmas and hear from you and commune with you and worship you and be led by you? "

Even Christ won't force you to spend time with him. You have to choose. You have a free will that either makes Christ a stranger to you or a friend to you. We have to make that choice as we approach the wave of Christmas.

We have three weeks until Christmas. It's not too late this year to make things different – personally. I don't mean to throw out the tree and tell the kids there are going to be any presents.

I mean, *personally*, you alone. Ask yourself, "Am I worshipping Christ personally in this time when theoretically we are supposed to be worshipping him as a culture? Have I done that lately? Will I do that between now and Christmas? How will I do that, how will I make that time – me, personally, alone – how will I make that time for Christ in the next three weeks? "

This isn't deep, biblical information – but it is information that will radically transform your life. That's the goal. That's the call. That's the command from heaven. It's that God would use us to encourage one another to truly follow Christ and to be transformed. And

I promise you, you will be transformed through your personal, relational communion with Christ on a daily basis. Going to church does not make you a Christian any more than going to McDonald's makes you a hamburger.

I know there are some here today who haven't made a commitment to Christ, to know Jesus personally and to follow him as your Lord. My encouragement to you is the same thing. Find out who Jesus is. Make a commitment to say, "Okay, if it's not about going to church, what is it about? If it's about getting to know Jesus, how can I get to know Jesus? Who in my life can help me get to know Jesus? How can I figure out how to begin this 'investigation' (initially) into who Jesus Christ is, and then begin a relationship with him?"

And then ask us or someone who is following Jesus for some help. We have many resources to help you, but my prayer is that you would know someone personally who is a Christ follower who can help you follow Christ too. Find someone to help you get to know Jesus, and you're welcome to contact us.

Jesus did not come, he did not condescend from his throne room in heaven to be born, to be incarnate, in the lowest, most humble (honestly disgusting) environment that he could be born in for the spiritually elite. He did not do that for the religiously trained. He did it for sinners. He did it for sinners like us. He came for sinners – like us.

Jesus himself said in Luke 19:10.

**Luke 19:10 (NLT)**

***10 For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.***

Jesus is seeking you this Christmas and he is seeking to save you. Are you running from him on the way to the mall? Don't run. Don't run from Christ as you run up your credit cards. Let him find you. He is seeking you. He wants to spend time with you. He wants to transform you by the renewing of the mind. He wants to empower you. He wants to give you peace that passes understanding. He wants you to know the eternal truths that are in him. Let him find you. He's seeking you. Receive his salvation. Receive the gift that he came to bring.

What we truly need this Christmas is Jesus, personally. Not knowledge about Jesus. Not an understanding of the Christmas story. Not a cute saying. ("Jesus is the reason for the season.") Jesus *IS* the reason for the season, but what I am trying to get across is that we can say it and not do it. We need to "know him" personally – meaning, we need to spend time with him. When it's all said and done, it's about knowing Jesus.

Don't let Christmas slip by without knowing Jesus, or without communing with him in that relational knowledge.

We need to EXPERIENCE the PRESENCE of the Personal, Supernatural God, who came to his earth so that he could be "God With Us."

You know, the only act of Christmas – Jesus Christ coming himself – could fulfill all that God has done for us. This is the mighty God, El Elyon, The Host of the Armies of Heaven, The Creator God who is your Good Shepherd. He is your Comforter, he is your Peace, he is your Friend, who cares for you. He is the Author of Life, and he is the Giver of Eternal Life. I want you to see that he is both high and low. He is so big that we are in awe of him and that there's times we have to bow at his majesty and just be overwhelmed and speechless at the awesomeness of who God is. And then we need to be even more in awe, and even more speechless that he would come to die in our place, to pay for our sin, to give us eternal life, that is his and his alone.

That eternal life that you have if you're saved today, it's not yours. You did nothing for it, **Ephesians 2:8-9** says. It's a gift from God. That eternal life that you own is his. And there is a time we have to be amazed that the mighty Creator, God of Heaven and Earth would do that for us.

Turn to Psalm 95:6-7 for me.

**Psalm 95:6-7 (NLT)**

***6 Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker,  
7 for he is our God. We are the people he watches over, the flock under his care. If only you would listen to his voice today!***

If only we would *listen* to his voice today. Isn't that the real issue? That we don't *make* the time or put in the real *effort* to listen to his voice?

I know many would like to listen to his voice, but would say, "How? How do I do this?" I would tell you this, make a commitment to and then don't stop. Set yourself to this.

It's simple, but it's not easy. His voice is in his Word, primarily. And any other way you hear his voice will never contradict his Word. So first, and foremost, you must learn to hear God's voice in his Word. My prayer is that you would make that commitment to learn how to listen to the voice of God and that you would get a discipler to help you and that you would set yourself to it and not stop until you hear from him – until he is leading and guiding you and transforming you by the renewing of your mind.

And then we need to learn to worship. We need to learn to open the Bible and worship God. Worship is not what we do for the first thirty minutes of church service. Worship is what we do with our lives. All of creation worships God and we need to learn to worship him. And we need to learn to worship him according to his Word and in his Word.

As Christmas rushes up on us again, my prayer is that we would make a commitment to make the time to listen to his voice; to worship him, bow down, kneel before him as the only true God and Creator of the Universe.

And then, also to know that you are his. You are his son or daughter and he watches over you. You are his flock and he cares for you as your Good Shepherd. But we have to make a commitment to the time and the effort it takes to know (personally) that he is both the Mighty God who dwells in unapproachable light *and* our Good, Good Father who knows our name and who knows every burden we are currently carrying.

And he says to you in 1 Peter 5:7 (write this one down)

**1 Peter 5:7 (NLT)**

***7 Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.***

Listen, the key there is *give*. God knows you have worries. God knows you have cares, you have anxieties. How do you give your worries and cares to God? This is hard to do. This is easier said than done because we have a tendency to hold on to those anxieties and those cares and concerns. The only way you can do it is learn to do it. That's what he wants. Roll them over, let him carry them. He is your Good Shepherd.

As we spend time with the Lord, doing what we were made to do which is worshipping him and having a relationship with him, he transforms us. And he continues to transform us so that we *can* give our cares and worries to him, so that we *can* have the peace that he came to give us.

God has given us his very best *IN* Jesus Christ.

Turn to Romans 8:32. It says,

**Romans 8:32 (NLT)**

***32 Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?***

The *context* of that verse in Romans 8 tells us God is *not* talking about the material things of the world there. He is talking about so much more than that. He is talking about the things that eternally matter.

And although it's hard to believe by looking around, *that* is actually what Christmas is all about. It's about the incredible eternal life Jesus came to give us and the incredible eternal promises that God has given us *IN Christ*.

But, what if we miss experiencing that *again* this year? What if we get caught up in the whirlwind that is Christmas and simply survive yet another year? What if we never stop long enough to *know*, to *worship* Jesus... in the midst of the holiday that bears his name?

If you have received Jesus as your Savior today, then Christ lives in you! Jesus Christ *lives IN you!* And through your increasing faith in him his life is becoming your life today! And you have the assurance and sharing his eternal life and his glory with him.

**Colossians 1:26–27 Paul says (NLT)**

***26 This message was kept secret for centuries and generations past, but now it has been revealed to God's people.***

***27 . . . And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory.***

This gift to you was the *reason* Jesus was born in the manger that Christmas night and now by your *faith* in him, he lives in you.

But... you may actually treat him more like a stranger while you are hectically celebrating his birth.

Jesus Christ lives in you but *you* have to make the time and effort to *spend* with Jesus, to *worship* Jesus, to *thank* him for what this season truly means.

Turn over to Psalm 46:10-11.

**Psalm 46:10–11 (NLT)**

***10 "Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world."***

***11 The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress.***

These things are true about God. But, we must take the time and effort to know it – personally. We have to make a commitment to be still in the Lord's presence even though we have a thousand things to do and we woke up already late. We must make a

commitment to stop and be still and know that our God – *IS GOD* – and that he is with us.

Especially during the Christmas season. Nothing is as important as spending time with Jesus himself *for* Jesus himself. Not even for what Jesus can give you, but for Jesus *himself*.

**Sarah Young** says, *Remember, the Giver is infinitely greater than any gift...*

Do not forsake the giver by focusing only on what you are asking him to give you.

We already read about the greatest of all gifts back in **Colossians 1:27**, *And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory.*

Spending some time thanking Jesus for *that* greatest give and spending time worshipping him for *who he is* will transform how you view Christmas and maybe how you handle Christmas.

Do you know one of the greatest antidotes to stress is worship? As Christmas overwhelms us, can we make some time to *worship* the One who Christmas is about?

Remember Romans 12:12 says,

**Romans 12:2 (NLT)**

*2 Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think . . .*

Genuine worship transforms you by *changing* the way you *think*. We've got to redirect our focus onto personally worshipping the One who Christmas is all about.

Now, I know it's easier said than done and nobody just falls into this without some effort. But that is what I'm asking you to do today. To make the effort to *develop* this relationship with the Lord. You can use a devotional to start, but you can't read it like a newspaper.

If you read your devotional like you read the newspaper then you'll have a relationship with the Lord like you do with the writer of the newspaper. None. It's not about knowledge; it's about personal relationship.

We must allow the Living Word of God to *speak* to us. We can use a devotional to *direct* us to God's Word, but we cannot be satisfied until GOD has spoken to us – and we have listened.

Right now it's very easy to get a hold of Christmas Devotionals (ADVENT). And if you need help, call us or send us an e-mail and we'll direct you to some good ones. We also have good devotionals in the back, along with the Daily Devotion Journals that teach you how to do this. But my goal today is to *inspire* you to set yourself to this until you begin to figure it out.

So I thought I'd go through one very famous Psalm for you, so you can hear an example (at least my style.) You have to develop your own style. (We all have one.) But you cannot *stop* pressing in on this until you know that God has spoken to you and that you have listened.

So turn to Psalm 23 and I'll give you an example from a Psalm that is familiar to many of us.

This is from my ESV Legacy Bible.

***The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*** Lord I am yours because you purchased me. I am one of your sheep because you paid the highest price for me, the ultimate price for me. Because you paid that price for me Lord, I can trust you. I can trust you to meet all of my needs. I don't have to worry, I don't have to want. But I have to follow you.

And you'll make me lie down in green pastures; you'll make a place of rest for me. A place where I can lie down with you and rest. And you'll lead me beside still waters for reflection and you'll take me to a place where I can hear from you, where I can reflect on what's happening in my life, and what you're doing in my life.

And Lord, through that rest and through that reflection you will restore my soul. That's what I need, Lord. I need you to constantly restore my soul. And Lord you'll lead me in the paths of your righteousness. And you do it for your name's sake, for your glory. And so I say with your Word, Lord, lead me and guide me for your name's sake. Show me the right way to go. Set my path before me, Lord.

And even though I'll walk through the darkest valleys of this life, Lord, not the moment of death, because that is celebration. But the fear, the great shadows of tribulation, trauma and trial in this life. Though I walk through them Lord, I will not fear any evil. Because you are with me. Because of your constant presence Lord, I will not fear the shadow of tribulation. I will not fear the trials and the deep valleys of this life.

And Lord, your rod and your staff will comfort me, your protection is your rod and your direction is your staff. And through your correction and direction Lord, you'll comfort me as I submit to you. And you'll lead me through that valley and you'll set a table for

me – a banquet with you Lord. A banquet to commune with you. And you'll do it in the presence of my enemies. And they will be held at bay – even death will be held at bay. Overcome to allow me to commune with you in the banquet you have set for me.

And you'll anoint my head with oil, pouring out the anointing of comfort and peace and healing of the Holy Spirit on my head. And my cup will overflow because of who you are Lord. Because of who you are in my life.

And because I follow you as my shepherd, surely goodness and mercy will follow me. I trust you, Lord. And goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life. And I will dwell forever in your presence. I will dwell all my days, all the days of this life in the house of the Lord. And I will dwell with you forever. Lord, I'll live with you forever in your glory, in the glory of heaven.

Lord, that's your promise. That's where I'm headed. That's what you came for. Lord keep me a sheep. Be my Good Shepherd. Lead and guide me Lord through trials and tribulations. Be my peace. Be my comforter. Be my guide. And my cup will overflow with true blessings. Goodness and mercy will follow me and I will dwell in your presence all my days and into eternity.

Let's pray. *Lord I pray that you would do that for us, that you would draw us into that place. That we would be moved to meet you there in the quiet place. That we would do it during the Christmas rush and the Christmas craziness. That we would meet you and that we would be transformed by you. That we would have a real relationship with you, ultimately for your glory in our lives. In your name Jesus, we pray, amen.*