

**Christmas 2013**  
*Welcome to Advent*  
**December 1, 2013**

**Prelude      My Heart is Filled**

**Worship      Allelujah**

**Video   Simple Christmas**

**Part One**

So does that video strike a chord with you? It certainly does with me. Far too often I get to Christmas day and I have a sinking feeling.

What happened to the season? I didn't even get to enjoy it. I didn't rest enjoying the beauty of the season. I didn't savor time with family. I was too busy running from here to there and everywhere.

And every November, I think this year... This year it will be different. I'll spend unhurried time with family. I'll spend less money on stuff we don't need. I'll really engage in the moment and enjoy the memories we are making. I'll make Jesus the reason for the season. I'll take time to really reflect on the meaning of Christmas.

Now don't get me wrong, it's not a total bust. Over the years, we have incorporated some great new traditions to our family, mostly thanks to what we have learned from messages here at NHCC, like spending less on stuff and more on making memories. Each year before Thanksgiving our family creates a top 3 that each person would like to do during the holidays as a family to create memories. Like baking, attending a play, seeing Christmas lights or having a special dinner out together. Our kids know that our Christmas budget for presents is less so we can spend more on making memories.

Another tradition we have added is spending less on ourselves so we can be more generous to those in need. Our Christmas budget includes amounts to be given away to others through purchasing gifts or making donations to those in need. We have done this through a variety of ways including the Clay Platte Foster Family tree (here at NHCC in the entry hall), the NHCC Christmas Blessing (formerly the Giving Tree), and through giving trees at our kids' schools.

And those are great things and I'm glad we have incorporated them but each December 25<sup>th</sup>, I still find that something is missing. And for me, it's something the video said...When Christmas begins with worship, it all becomes meaningful. Less me and more Jesus.

I can honestly say just about every Christmas season I rush through with my list of things to do...things to do for home, things to do for our extended family and friends, things to do for NHCC and for Jesus. I just don't have time to really get quiet and worship Jesus.

And maybe this year, I'm a little more convicted to make it happen. As some of you know, just over 3 months ago I was finishing up my six week sabbatical. Here at NHCC, one of the blessings we receive as a staff member is that for every 6-7 years of ministry we receive a six week sabbatical for the purpose of

renewing, restoring and replenishing.

When I returned from sabbatical I shared with you all that I had realized that I had gotten so busy doing the work of God that I was neglecting being with God.

Which I had to admit was quite embarrassing as a person who spends their primary vocational energy working in ministry. I mean after all, if I'm working "for Jesus" shouldn't I just naturally stay plugged in to worshipping Him? Especially at this season!

Well you'd think so but I think for most of us, ministry types included, really engaging in worship in this season can get so crowded out by the to do list of baking, shopping, wrapping, mailing cards and packages, attending Christmas parties and celebrating with family. And for those in ministry, add in there the preparations for Christmas Eve and other Christmas events. After all, Christmas is one of the highest attended times in the church. So if you work for the church there is so much work to do.

So it's easy, no matter who you are, to see the reason for the season get squeezed right out or just narrowed to a little plaque we hang on the wall.

So as we head in to this Christmas season, I wanted to do a service that allowed us to pause. To really consider if we are really living as if Jesus is the reason for the Season or are just saying He is?

Are we spending time really contemplating what it meant for Jesus to come into our world? To be born into human flesh and to live a life that would serve as God's ultimate gift to all of us? Are we really experiencing Joy in our World because Jesus Christ was born?

Perhaps you have this nailed down. Perhaps you go through this season and are fully engaged with exactly how amazing and wonderful it is that Jesus was born to us. A King. A Savior. The Messiah, Christ the Lord.

And if so, then may God continually to richly bless you with a heart of gratitude overflowing as you consider the enormity of it all.

But if you are like me and you have spent too many Christmas seasons distracted by cares of this world. I know all too well that we can be doing great things for Jesus at Christmas like serving those in need, loving on the lost and lonely but if we are not spending time with Jesus, then we are still missing out. Because when it all begins with worshipping Him then we can allow Him to move in us and through us.

So whether you are being distracted by the minute details of Christmas cards and shopping lists, the servant hearted list of giving and serving or overwhelmed by the difficulty of life, I want to invite you to join me in bringing Jesus back to the center of our hearts and our Christmas this year by engaging in an age-old practice.

For centuries, Christians around the world and in a variety of denominations have celebrated Advent. Advent is celebrating during the four Sundays leading up to Christmas.

Advent means coming. It is a time used to specifically prepare one's heart for the celebration of the coming of Jesus Christ in to our world. Traditionally each week has a specific focus to reflect on including scriptures and the lighting of a candle in the Advent wreath.

I personally grew up in a faith tradition that religiously celebrated Advent but honestly it had become so much just "a thing you do" that for most of my life it had little effect on me but this year as I contemplated how I could get more focused on Jesus in this season that really is all about Him and not about my to do list, I was reminded of Advent.

I was reminded that the traditions of Advent can be a purposeful and tangible way to quiet my heart, to engage with Jesus and to allow Him to overflow in my heart and life at this hectic time of year.

Obviously you normally would do each week on the Sunday noted but for our time, we are going to get an overview of all four weeks at once.

I've asked help from our amazing Arts Ministry folks to guide us in this experience of Advent. The band will come in just a moment and play "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" and as they do I want to invite you to still your heart and listen to the lyrics. This old familiar song that speaks of a longing and a rejoicing when Emmanuel, God with Us, comes to save us and set us free.

As the song concludes, members of our drama ministry will begin with readings representing the four Sundays of Advent. Each reading will end with the lighting of a candle in the Advent Wreath. The center of your program has the scriptures (and some additional ones) that they will be reading. These can serve as a way to bring Jesus into your heart and home as we go through the season.

After the candle is lit, questions will come up on the screen for you to ponder as a way to engage with Jesus. You can use the back of your program to jot your thoughts or simply just reflect in silence.

I want to invite you to sit back, quiet your mind and engage your heart in this time.

Let me pray for you.

**Feature            O Come, O Come Emmanuel**

**Reader 1 - Jimmy**

**Week One – Hope**

The words of the song cry out, O come, O come Emmanuel and ransom us from the captivity, the tyranny of the enemy. Save us and give us victory from the death of sin.

Far too often we feel like a captive in this world. Captive to pain, anxiety, worry. Situations and circumstances that feel overwhelming - a diagnosis, a fractured relationship, loss of income, and especially the death of a loved one. In times like these we feel hopeless.

**In the Bible, we read:**

For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ~ Jeremiah 29:11-13 (NIV)

God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? ~ Numbers 23:19 (NIV)

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. ~ Isaiah 9:2 (NIV)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. ~ 1 Peter 1:3 (NIV)

**We light the first candle of Advent for Hope. The hope found in Jesus of Nazareth, Emmanuel, God with us.**

*(Reader lights the candle)*

## **Reader 2 - Laurie**

### **Week Two – Peace**

The words of the song cry out, O come, O come Emmanuel, cheer our spirits by your coming. Banish the darkness and shadows of sin. Give us your peace.

Peace on earth. It is a common saying and a very common longing. Watching and reading the news, our hearts cry out for a world that is no longer filled with struggle, conflict and war. For many, our own homes and hearts feel like a war zone with little rest, little peace. We long for an end to the chaos and for peace that passes all understanding to surround our hearts and minds.

### **The word of God says,**

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. ~ Isaiah 9:6-7 (NLT)

For the LORD your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will sing joyful songs over you. ~ Zephaniah 3:17 (NLT)

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. ~ Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)

I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid. ~ John 14:27 (NLT)

**We light the second candle of Advent for Peace. The peace that can be received from Jesus of Nazareth, Emmanuel, God with us.**

*(Reader lights the candle)*

## **Reader 1 - Jimmy**

### **Week Three – Joy**

The words of the song cry out, O come, O come Emmanuel, open the door to heaven and give us a safe path to eternity with You. Turn our misery to joy.

Joy-we seek it in so many things-a new purchase, a new relationship, good food, more money, great friends. And all these blessings can bring moments of joy. But the problem is this joy can be fleeting. When the new purchase breaks or the relationship grows stale and the things that brought us joy no longer do so we are left wanting again. God offers us joy that can be present in all circumstances: good or bad, encouraging or discouraging. He offers us a joy that can permeate every part of our lives from the inside out.

**Scripture after scripture encourages us to rejoice, to be filled with Joy in the promises of our God and King,**

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. ~ Isaiah 65:18 (NIV)

Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. ~ Zephaniah 3:14-15 (NIV)

The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ~ Luke 2:10-11 (NIV)

In that wonderful day you will sing: “Thank the Lord! Praise his name! Tell the nations what he has done. Let them know how mighty he is! Sing to the Lord, for he has done wonderful things. Make known his praise around the world. Let all the people of Jerusalem shout his praise with joy! ~ Isaiah 12:1-6 (NLT)

**We light the third candle of Advent for Joy. The Joy found in knowing and following Jesus of Nazareth, Emmanuel, God with us.**

*(Reader lights the candle)*

**Reader 2 - Laurie**  
**Week Four – Love**

The words of the song cry out, O come, O come Emmanuel, bring your people together in one heart and mind. Teach us to love one another and turn from conflict and discord.

It was because of His great love for us that God the Father sent His one and only son into the world. We look in the mirror and become painfully aware of all the ways we are falling short, all the ways we aren't measuring up and that Jesus said I will come, I will live and I will die for you just as you are. Then we begin to understand what true love is really all about. And because we are loved deeply, we can begin to love others not for what they do for us but simply because they are worthy of love.

**Listen to these words from the scriptures:**

For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ~ John 3:16 (NLT)

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples. ~ John 13:34-35 (NLT)

This is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ~ 1 John 3:11 (NLT)

We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person? Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God.

~ 1 John 3:16-19 (NLT)

This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ~1 John 4:10 (NIV)

**We light the fourth candle of Advent for Love. The love poured out on us by Jesus of Nazareth, Emmanuel, God with us.**

*(Reader lights the final candle)*

### **Message - Part Two**

Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. These are the four traditional reflection points of Advent. So what about you? Are you looking for those this Christmas season?

Before that night when history changed, when Jesus was born in to our world, things weren’t that much different. People were living in a challenging time. They were longing for life to be different. They were looking and waiting for a promise given by the prophets hundreds of years before. At some point, God would send their Messiah, the Chosen One.

They weren’t sure who to expect. They weren’t sure what His Kingdom would look like but they knew they needed Him. They needed to be set free... set free from the heaviness of the world.

I think most of us aren’t so different. We have a longing in us for the world to be made right. No more war, no more death, no more fractured relationships, no more tears, no more pain, no more suffering.

We hope that Christmas time will be the most wonderful time of the year. Because we need hope that the brokenness of our world will fade away. We long for the peace that we are promised at Christmas time. That feeling that all is right with the world. A sense of hope, peace, joy and love. It’s so easy to start searching for those in the temporary promises of “Christmas” instead of the eternal promises of Jesus Christ, the reason for the season.

When I think about that longing for hope, peace, joy and love. That longing for all to be right in the world, I’m reminded of what the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8 verses 22-25 (and I really love reading this from The Message translation).

*All around us we observe a pregnant creation. The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply birth pangs. But it’s not only around us; it’s within us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We’re also feeling the birth pangs. These sterile and barren bodies of ours are yearning for full deliverance. That is why waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, don’t see what is enlarging us. But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy.*

Like the nation of Israel, we too are waiting. Aching to be set free. Looking expectantly for the coming of the Messiah.

### **Video Advent: God With Us**

So like the guy in the video, we can be ready and waiting and looking forward with great anticipation for the coming of our Savior Christ the Lord to return and set all of creation free from the law of sin and death. One day Jesus will return. He has come and He will come again to make all things new. But until that day comes, we are invited to prepare our hearts and open them up for the hope, peace, joy and love He offers us now.

We can even now set time aside each day to spend with God. We can reflect on who Jesus is, why He came in to the world and we can allow him to work on us from the inside out.

His Kingdom is near and now not just in the future when the reset button gets hit. Every day, but especially during this Advent season, we can allow His Holy Spirit to infuse in to our hearts the hope, peace, joy and love He promises to give us in this life no matter our circumstances. And as that truth permeates our lives, God will use it to impact our world. Less me, less you, more Jesus. Let's begin this Christmas with worship. And as we worship Emmanuel, God with Us, then everything else becomes more meaningful. Let's go through this Christmas season engaged with the reason for the season and as we engage with Jesus, our lives, our Christmas will become more about Him and we will spread the joy of Christmas to the world around us.

Let's pray.

Please stand and sing Joy to the World with us as a reminder that there can be Joy in our world because a Savior has been born to us. He is Christ the Lord. Let earth receive her King. Let us receive our King. Let our hearts be prepared this Advent season.

**Band Joy to the World**

**Shannon Closing Benediction-Remain standing**

*May the hope of the Lord be yours.*

*May the Lord's peace permeate every area of your life.*

*May you have joy knowing the Lord is with you no matter your circumstance and that He will see you through.*

*And may you know just how wide and how deep the love of God is for you. Never forgetting the price He was willing to pay for you.*

*May the grace and truth of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you throughout this season and in all the days to come.*

*Amen.*

**Offering at Door**

**Next Sunday Adventureland Christmas - NO 8:15 service!!**