

“Missing Christmas In Spite of Christmas”, Week 3 of “What’s It Really About – Unwrapping the True meaning of Christmas”

Presented by Rev. Kristen Lowe on 12-17-2017

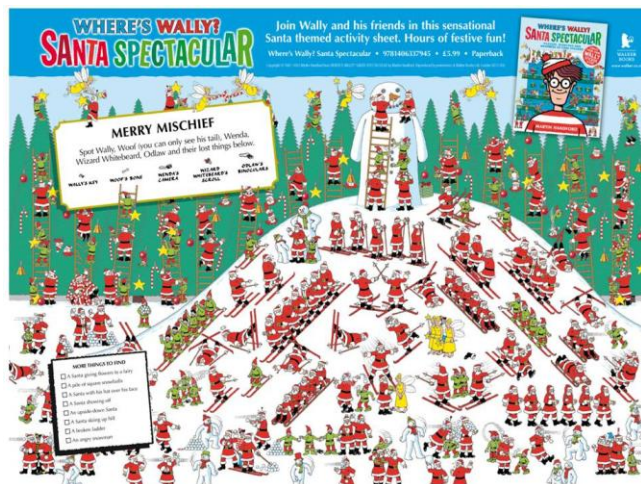
At Crossroads United Methodist Church, Waunakee, WI.

Isaiah 9: 2 & 6

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned. A child is born to us, a son is given to us, and authority will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

Luke 2: 8-18

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.



Have you ever played the game Where's Waldo? It's a puzzle in which there are so many things going on that finding the desired object: Waldo – with this simple striped shirt, is difficult. Now, if we were to try finding Waldo on a blank slate, it would be easy. But, part of the game is that there are lots and lots of distractions. For one, many of the objects in the puzzle look a lot like the target we're searching for. But, when we look closer, we realize they are not. And, if you're like me, it's pretty easy to get carried away in the puzzle and look at all the things going on and completely forget about Waldo. It reminds me of Christmas. There's so much going on that losing sight of the simple message of Christmas can overtake us. We have so much thrown at us – invading our

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senses, that it’s easy to become overwhelmed – and even numb. We find ourselves focusing in the wrong object. In our scripture, we read that the very first people whom God revealed the birth of the Messiah to were the simplest of people. He didn’t try to make the splashiest entrance, nor did he reveal himself first to the richest or most influential. In fact, as we look deeper into the scriptures, we realize that the shepherds were among the lowest class of people on the social scale. Why would the heavens open to them first? I have a theory.



We’ve all seen “A Charlie Brown Christmas.” Charlie Brown spends the show as so many people do today, looking in all the wrong places for the true meaning of Christmas. He thinks that maybe it’s putting on a Christmas play, or finding just the right tree to decorate. But the other kids all argue over the details of the play, and call him “stupid” for the scrawny little tree he buys. In the end, his friend Linus tells Charlie Brown the true meaning of Christmas by reciting the Bible verses about the shepherds, and about Jesus’ birth.



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We are in danger of missing Christmas in spite of Christmas. We are surrounded with so many Christmas details vying for our attention. Vying to be most important. And many of these things grab our attention simply because they are more enjoyable than other things. Glitter is far more beautiful and breathtaking than animal urine. The Night before Christmas is easier on the heart than the story of the Christ Child, born to suffer and take away our sins. We want the season to be filled with wonder and magic. The interesting thing is that without the tinsel, the wrapped presents, the holiday carols, greeting cards, store discounts, Christmas trees and shiny ornaments... There is more wonder and magic than we can possibly process. Far more than we can duplicate in blinking lights. But it takes boldness... it takes a childlike curiosity... it takes a heart of simplicity to look past the lights and glitter and cultural amenities to see - Christmas.

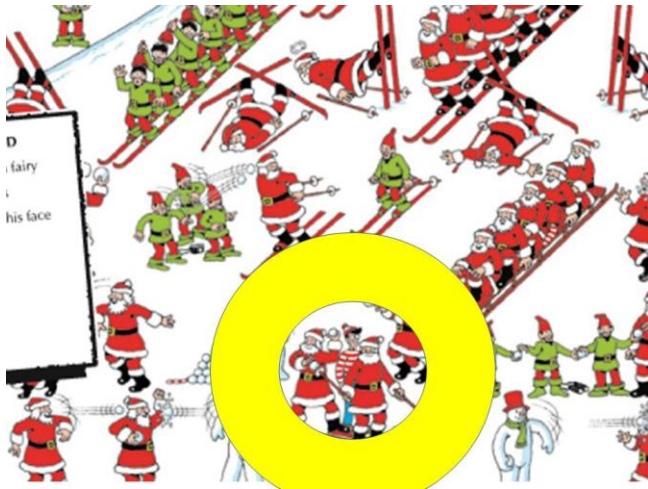


With these Where's Waldo puzzles... I guess I never got into them as much as some people. I had friends, when Waldo first came out, who really enjoyed the game. They got these books and would not only find Waldo, but they would find other things that were hidden within the puzzle. Me, I never really got into it. I could take it or leave it. Once someone gave me a Where's Waldo thousand piece puzzle. I thought about putting it together but wasn't really all that excited about it. I never did put it together. Maybe I missed all the excitement and accomplishment my friends were experiencing. Hard to know without actually participating.

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For some of us, the glitter is wonderful – and that’s really all we want. We’re not interested or invested enough to walk right past these things to find something far more extraordinary than anything we’ve ever encountered.



There is a story about a shepherd who was a youth on that first Christmas night. And now he is old and as his grandson sits on his knee he recalls that night, "A long, long time ago, when I was a little more than a boy, I was out on the Judean hills one night with some other shepherds, keeping watch over the flock. And an angel of the Lord came upon us and the glory of the Lord shone roundabout us. And we were very afraid. But the angel said, "fear not... for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord... you shall find the baby in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." When he had said this the old man’s lips quivered and ceased to move and there was silence. Then the grandson turns and looks with wide, puzzled eyes into his grandfather’s face and says, "But, grandfather is that all? What did you do when you heard the good news? Was what the angel said really true? Was the Christ child ever really born?" The old shepherd sadly shakes his white head and answers, "I never knew. I never went to see. Some say that it is all a myth. Others

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say they found in Him, the light of God and the power for life. But for me I could never be quite sure. Because I never did go to see.”



Perhaps the young Shepherd boy wasn't as struck by the holiness in the moment as the other shepherds. Perhaps he didn't want to believe - maybe believing was going to be inconvenient to his current lifestyle. Perhaps he was shy or scared and no one reached out to invite him to go with them. Maybe he thought that once he got there he would be judged by other people. Whatever his reason, it distracted him away from something forever life changing. I told you earlier that I have my theory about why God revealed the Messiah's birth to the Shepherds first. I believe that because of their social status, they could best understand the message of simplicity.



There is only one message that Jesus comes with... Love. The message is so far beyond simple that if we get distracted, we might miss the fullness of it. Love. And... love is about sacrifice. “Greater love has no man...” Are you willing to lay down your pride, your feeling of safety or your walls to invite someone to Christmas Eve service this year? It may be their chance to meet Christ and begin a transformed life radiating with joy. And you know, the lights, the tinsel and the Christmas tree can

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act as a catalyst to move your spirit toward the center of Christmas – rather than being a distraction. And, we do this by being intentional. God’s simple act of love born in a manger was no accident. The shepherds were no coincidence. It was all part of a plan to continually point us toward one thing.



This Christmas, look harder. Look with intentionality past the glitz of the season. Don’t miss Christmas in spite of Christmas.