

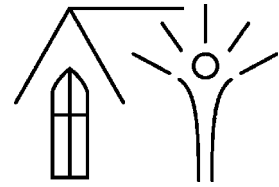


ROSELLE
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Our Mission Statement:

*"To Know Christ,
To Grow in Christ,
To Show Others Christ"*



December 11, 2005

Sermon – “Twelve Ways to Prepare for Christmas”

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Reverend Thomas Kim

You have all seen and heard the Christmas story so many times that you know exactly what the Bible says about it, right? A couple of quiz questions about the Christmas story, ready?

Question number one, **“What did the innkeeper say to Mary and Joseph?”**

- a) I have a stable out back?
- b) Come back after the holidays?
- c) There's no room in the inn?
- d) Both a and c
- e) None of the above

The answer is: e. An innkeeper is never mentioned in the Bible.

Question number two, **“When did baby Jesus cry?”**

- a) When He opened the wise men's gifts
- b) Whenever babies usually cried
- c) When the cattle started lowing
- d) No crying He makes?
- e) Who knows?

The answer is: b. Baby Jesus was fully human as well as fully God. I think some of you have been to too many Christmas plays.

It is a season of joy, which helps us to smile and even laugh. When we are filled with joy, we can't help from breaking into laughter, can we?

Do you know laughter is a good exercise? Do you want to know how good and why good about it? Laughter is:

1. **Jogging of the internal organs.** When you laugh, all the internal organs are moving and even shaking. So some times you feel hurt when you laugh hard.
2. **Laughter is very good for your diet.** Your body is made of 651 muscles, and when you laugh, 251 muscles are used. However, when you are mad or angry and make a wry face, you use only 51 muscles in your face. Laughing is called a ha-ha diet!
3. **Laughter prevents cancer, and is a healing power.** When you laugh, natural killer cells (known as NK cells) are increased. NK cells are specialized to kill bad cells such as those cells

infected with virus or that are cancerous. Do you want a longer and healthier life? Just laugh without reason.

Americans' life expectancy in 2003 was 77.6 years, for men 74.8, for women 80.1. When we live 77.6 years, we spend 24 years sleeping, and 29 years for work including chores and studying, 1 year in the bath room, 1.5 years for make-up for women, and 3 years and 3 months for waiting for a person who is late for a meeting. However, we spend only 44 days in laughing. Do you want to live a long life? Any good medications? The best one is laughter.

Now it is the season filled with joy. Are you filled with joy to prepare Christmas? Then laugh! Laughter is a sign of life and sign of joy.

John the Baptist says, "*Make straight the way of the Lord.*"

In a "Peanuts" cartoon strip, good old Charlie Brown says to Linus, "Life is just too much for me. I've been confused from the day I was born. I think the whole trouble is that we're thrown into life too fast. We're not really prepared." And Linus asks, "What did you want . . . a chance to warm up first?"

The Advent season is supposed to be our chance to warm up. It's that time to prepare our hearts and homes for the birth of the Christ child. It's that time when we put all the decorations in their place, the presents are bought and wrapped, the cards sent out and received, and we get ready for Christmas Day. But if we aren't careful the time of preparation will be over and the big day will be here and it will be just another day. We'll finish opening all the gifts; the room will be strewn with scraps of wrapping paper and ribbon; the turkey or ham will have put up a valiant fight but be nothing but leftovers; and we'll be parked in front of the TV watching one of the games. Then all of a sudden that empty feeling will hit us. That feeling of "What's the use?" That Charlie Brown feeling of something missing, as if we were thrown into Christmas too fast. That's when we'll realize we needed time to warm up.

To warm up and prepare for Christ, I would like to suggest 12 ways to prepare Christmas. I don't expect you to remember all. I hope is that one or two might catch you and help you approach Christmas with a new intent and spirit. Let me remind you John the Baptist's saying, "Make straight the way of the Lord." I rephrase it, "Laugh with joy to prepare the coming of the Lord."

First is to give homemade gifts. As you know, homemade means "heart-made." A loaf of bread, a painting, a birdhouse, mittens, scarf. Homemade gifts tell of time and effort and love more than store-bought things. To that extent they are personal act of love--*sharing life*--precisely what Christmas is about.

Second suggestion is to give service coupons. That is, you will give some service as a gift to someone: plant flowers around someone's house, watch the baby for a day, walk a dog, visit the sick.

Third is to give love in someone's name. "In your name, I am making a donation to this or that worthy cause," and drop a check to a charity. One man relates, "Christmas shopping for me was the most depressing time of the year. I don't know which part of me suffered more, my feet or my soul." Last time when I had my birthday, SPRC made a donation for Katrina Relief in my name. It was the most meaningful gift I had ever.

The **fourth** is to make homemade Christmas cards. Nowadays it is very easy project to make and reproduce them. If you don't have these things, there's still crayons and paste. The children especially will delight in making their own cards. Christmas is not just another holiday with non-offensive, politically correct motif.

Number **five** suggestion is to share laughter with other with joy and peace of the season. Share good stories with your children and others.

Sixth is this: Have a birthday celebration for Jesus.

The **seventh** is to have the display of the nativity scene in your home. It should be a centerpiece for the Christian family.

Eighth is, kind of a difficult suggestion, to use a potted tree for Christmas and save both the forests and overpowering the garbage heap.

The **ninth** suggestion is, by all means, keep Santa, but remind the family that Santa is the Latin word for Saint. Be a Santa yourself, and give gifts to not the most but the least recognized one among your neighbors.

The **tenth** is related to the ninth. Limit your gifts. Draw names out of a hat and those one or two persons are the objects of your gift-giving this year. It helps the budget and concentrates the gifts.

The **eleventh** is to read a Christian book to your children or grandchildren. It will plant the spirit of the season in their souls.

The final and **twelfth** suggestion is this: Give yourself a gift. That is, give yourself the gift of time: time for prayer, reflection, and meditation. As you are centered in faith, so will you enable others to be.

Those twelve suggestions are only to put Christ back in Christmas. Whether you adopt any or all of these suggestions to keep the faith focus where it belongs during this busy season, keep in mind what it's all about. It is about love, about knowing Christ, and about showing the love of God through gifts and service, about priorities, about relationships honored and cemented through giving. It is about passing on the tradition of love, and about creating a new tradition of passing love since to pass on love is the real business of Christmas. To prepare for the passing on is the real business of Advent.

Many of you remember the humorist Sam Levenson. Levenson told the story about the birth of his first child. The first night home the baby would not stop crying. His wife frantically flipped through the pages of Dr. Spock to find out why babies cry and what to do about it. Since Spock's book was rather long, the baby cried a long time. Grandma was in the house, but since she had not read the books on child rearing, she was not consulted. The baby continued to cry until Grandma could stand it no longer and she shouted downstairs, "For heaven's sake, Sarah, put the down the book and pick up the baby!"

Good advice. Put down the busyness and pick up the baby. Put down the overwhelming shopping lists, and pick up the baby. And now is the time to prepare for the coming of the Lord.

As John the Baptist says, "Make straight the way of the Lord."