

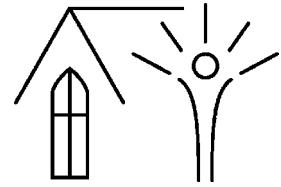


**ROSELLE**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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*Our Mission Statement:*

*“To Know Christ,  
To Grow in Christ,  
To Show Others Christ”*



December 24, 2006 (11:00 pm)

**Sermon: “Put Christ In Your Heart”**

Titus 2:11-14

Reverend Thomas Kim

Good Evening Christian soldiers!

You know Christmas is almost here when a war on Christmas is going on. There is a top ten list.

- 10) There are more pine needles on your carpet than on your tree.
- 9) The credit card is smoked along with the turkey and ham.
- 8) It's A Wonderful Life has been shown for the 13th time.
- 7) A trip to the mall and back is more challenging than the Indy 500.
- 6) The Salvation Army bell ringers start accepting credit cards.
- 5) You are pulling an all-nighter because of the words “Some Assembly Required.”
- 4) Your Christmas list is written in black while your checkbook is written in red.
- 3) Santa's belly is not the only thing shaking like a bowl full of jelly.
- 2) The NFL referees are not the only ones giving away games.
- 1) The infamous fruitcake returns from its 12 months of hiding.

Even without anything related to the above ten categories, we know Christmas is near since there is the war on Christmas.

A man was coming out of church one day, and the preacher was standing at the door as he always is to shake hands. He grabbed the man by the hand and pulled him aside. The pastor said to him, “You need to join the Army of the Lord!”

The man quickly replied, “I'm already in the Army of the Lord, Pastor.”

Pastor questioned, “How come I don't see you except at Christmas and Easter?”

He whispered back, “I'm in the secret service.”

We have some secret service agents here today, and we welcome you. Someday you will be a regular army of the Lord.

There's a war being fought on our very own shore and Al Qaida has nothing to do with it.

It's a conflict being played out in shopping malls, post offices, school, and just about everywhere that people congregate. Lines have been drawn, forces marshaled, and weapons locked and loaded — though in this case the arsenal is less about bunker-busters than about tacky tinsel.

It's the “war on Christmas.”

Seems that there has been, in the minds of some folks in our country, a conspiracy afoot to eliminate Christmas and replace it with something called “the holidays,” which has prompted a call to arms in certain realms of Christendom. Perhaps you've heard about these battles taking place:

John Gibson, a commentator on Fox News, came out with a book last year titled *The War on Christmas: How the Liberal Plot to Ban the Sacred Holiday is Worse Than You Thought*. In this book he talks about how “secularists” have tried to ban the word “Christmas” from stores, schools and government as a means of pushing Christianity back underground.

President Bush, himself a professing Christian, was roundly criticized by people in his own political party for sending out greeting cards with “Happy Holidays” on them last year instead of “Merry Christmas.” The president's people realized, rightly, that not everyone who receives the card is a Christian. One indignant commentator said he threw away the White House holiday card as soon as he received it because of the offending phrase.

Tim Wildmon of the American Family Association called for a consumer boycott of Target stores because the chain issued a holiday advertising circular in 2005 that did not mention Christmas. The year before, he aimed a similar boycott at Macy's, which averted a repeat this past December by proclaiming “Merry Christmas” in its advertising and in-store displays.

Merry Christmas, indeed.

Time for a little peace on earth among those on whom God's favor might rest if they'd stop carping about it. Perhaps we would do better to consider the war on Christmas.

Is Jesus really the reason for any of the stuff that Christmas has become? Would Jesus embrace all this? Well, we could argue that Jesus would be rolling over in his grave about what the holiday that claims his name has become — that is if Jesus were still in said grave ... which he's not ... which is really the whole point.

Instead of fighting to put Christ “back in Christmas,” maybe we should be taking him out of what it has become — allowing him to once again be the Savior of the world rather than the divider of it, disengaging from the metaphors of war and embracing the Prince of Peace.

Better yet, maybe we shouldn't seek to “put” Jesus anywhere at all and, instead, think about where we should put ourselves in relationship to him.

Paul's letter to Titus is instructive on this point, laying out the real reason for the season. “*God's grace has appeared, bringing salvation to all, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.*” The whole point of Christmas is that God, in the person of Jesus Christ, came among us.

Read the story and you'll see that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, didn't come to spark wars but stop them. The Prince of Peace didn't come to be a superior religious icon, but to serve. Christ didn't come to give gifts to the good little boys and girls and the coal fires of hell to the naughty ones. He came to live and die and live again as a sign for everyone — especially for the naughty and the needy.

The truth is that, in Jesus, God put himself with his people — all people, bringing salvation to all.

It all comes down to the fact that God, in his infinite wisdom and love, has chosen to be with us; to live in us, to work through us, to love us all. The truth is that Jesus entered the world as a smiling, helpless baby rather than as a mighty warrior, showing us that we don't have to fight for God's love. We don't have to earn it, to possess it, or hoard it for ourselves. We only have to embrace it.

God so loved the world. The Incarnation is God's reminder that we are loved. You think that we don't long to be loved? Listen to this story:

*A couple of weeks before Christmas, an elderly man in Phoenix telephoned his adult son in New York. He said, "Son, your mother and I have been married for 40 years, and I just wanted to call and tell you that we've decided to get a divorce."*

*His son was aghast. He said, "Dad, that's terrible! Don't you and Mother do a thing until I've had a chance to come and talk to you. I'll be on the next plane to Phoenix!"*

*They hung up, and the son called his sister in Chicago. He said, "Sis, Dad just called. He told me that he and Mom are getting a divorce."*

*His sister said, "Like heck they are! I'll meet you in Phoenix, and we'll talk some sense into them."*

*She hung up and immediately telephoned her father. She said, "Dad, brother just called me and told me that, after 40 years of marriage, you and Mom have decided to get a divorce. Don't you do a thing until I've had a chance to talk with you. I'll be on the next plane to Phoenix."*

*Her father hung up, turned to his wife, and said, "Honey, both kids are going to be home for Christmas, and they're paying their own way!"*

The elderly parents wanted to love them, and looked for a chance to love their children. God so loved the world. The Incarnation is God's reminder that we are loved. Do you welcome the love of God, Christ Babe, in the midst of your life? Where do you put Babe Jesus?

This is the holiest night of the year. It requires reflection and self-examination, and it brings to us the promise that we can be with each other in more meaningful ways.

On this night God chooses to be with us so that we might be with one another. May God's love shape our relationships. May God's wisdom guide our decisions. May God's glory touch our ordinary lives. And may God's gift this night live in us and through us, that what we experience in each other is the very presence of Christ.

So, go ahead and enjoy Christmas (or the holidays, or whatever you want to call it) — the tree, the gifts, the parties, the food, the family. All are wonderful things.

But if you're going to focus on putting Jesus somewhere, put him here (in your heart) and here (in your hands). Do that and you'll find yourself doing a lot less fighting and a lot more loving. Maybe then the world would look at Christmas, and Christians, a lot differently. Praise God.