

It Isn't Easy Getting Ready for Christmas

December 8 & 9, 2012

Introduction Slide #1

Getting Ready for Christmas – **(Click)** HARD WORK

Slide #2

Part of our work for Christmas is the decorating we like to do. Unfortunately how we packed up last year's Christmas decorations can make it more difficult to get them out again this year. Maybe the box in your attic looks like this **(Click)**, and the light come out like this **(Click)**. Untangling them is a huge pain you know where, so maybe just hang them on your house as they are **(Click)**. They can make a **(Click)** wonderful table decoration or center piece. Then of course there is comparison with the neighbors **(Click)** and how they decorated their house. I like the ingenuity on the next door neighbor **(Click)** .

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It wasn't easy getting ready for Christmas in Jesus' day either. Luke quoting Isaiah says, **(Click)** "A voice of one calling in the desert, Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God's Salvation."

This Advent season, we too are asked to **(Click)** "Prepare the way for the Lord." We are not to use bulldozers or pick and shovels, but rather with songs and lights and prayers and preaching. For the ultimate destination that Jesus Christ desires it not a temple or palace but to take up residence in our **(Click)** hearts. To get ready for Christmas, and to prepare that special place for Jesus in our hearts is not easy given the world in which we live. Why? **(Click)** There is so much else vying for our heart's attention to replace Jesus.

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Consumerism and commercialization has sold us a bill of goods that is not necessarily good, take for example the biggest selling video game of last

Christmas. It was Play Station 2 – **(Click)** Grand Theft Auto IV. On the surface it may sound harmless enough, but see the summary of the game by the New York Times: **(Click)** “This is a game in which all boundaries of civilized behavior have vanished. You get to shoot whomever you want, including cops. You get to beat women to death with baseball bats. You get to have sex with prostitutes and then kill them (and even get your money back).” I will not ask if any of our teens received this game last Christmas.

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A television interviewer was out in the Christmas rush and **(Click)** asked a woman busy shopping, “what is the meaning of Christmas?” **(Click)** Laughing, she responded, “Oh, I don’t know. Was it the day that Jesus died?” Commenting on the woman’s reply, the interviewer, Donald Deffner said, “Maybe there was more truth in her answer than she realized.”

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It’s not easy preparing for Christmas in such a world as ours. But it really has never been easy. **(Click)** Christ came then and now because this world needs saving.

It may be difficult for us to appreciate just how cruel the world was into which **(Click)** Christ was born. That world did not need video games because the reality of that world was violent and cruel. The best example of that time **(Click)** was King Herod of Judea. Because of he was so insecurity, he:

- a) Murdered three of his own sons because Herod thought they were too eager to succeed him;
- b) Murdered his mother-in-law because she had taken her daughter’s side against her husband Herod;
- c) Murdered his wife because she threatened to expose his involvement in order the execution of her mother;
- d) When Herod was dying, he ordered the most prominent citizens in Israel to come to Jericho for a visit. When they all arrived, he had them all locked up with instructions that they would all be killed as soon as Herod died. At least that way, there would be tears shed at his death, even though was it not for him specifically.
- e) So, ordering the slaughter of all boy babies in Bethlehem was not out of character for this man Herod.

(Click) Has our world become any less cruel? Our world is just as much in need of saving as the world into which Christ first came. Eleven years ago, our country at this time was still coming to terms with the events and destruction of 9-11.

(Click) For Christmas that year, former President Bush and his wife Laura sent out a Christmas Card trying to convey their faith and hope in the face of such a cruel event. **(Click)** The card prominently displayed this verse from the Psalms “I believe I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.”

That’s what Isaiah was referring to, “Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God’s salvation.” This is the hope that sustains us in good times and bad. We shall see God’s salvation. Christ came because this world of ours needed saving.

Slide #7

There is something about Christmas that elevates us. We feel more hopeful, more joyful than in any other season of the year.

(Click) Go with me to the year 1942. Our world was engulfed in World War II. The American Consul ordered all American Citizens to come home from the Persian Gulf, for fear they might get caught in the spreading conflict. **(Click)** Steve Goodier, in his book “One Minute Can Change a Life” describes the scene.

Travel was difficult and some civilians had secured passage on a troop ship, the *Mauritania*. Passengers included thousands of Allied soldiers, 500 German prisoners of war and 25 civilian women and children. The ship traveled slowly and cautiously, constantly in danger from hostile submarines patrolling the ocean depths. It was Christmas Eve and they had traveled for a full two months. They had only made it as far as the coastal waters of New Zealand and everyone on board were homesick, anxious and frightened.

Someone came up with the idea of asking the captain for permission to sing Christmas carols for the German prisoners, who were surely as homesick and lonely as any of the passengers. Permission was granted. So a small group made its way to the quarters where the unsuspecting prisoners were held. They

decided to sing “Silent Night” as written by the German Joseph Mohr. Within seconds a deafening clatter shook the floor, as hundreds of German soldiers sprang up from their beds and crowded around tiny windows to see and hear the small choir. Tears streamed down their faces and at that moment, everyone on both sides of the war understood the universal truth – that all people everywhere are one. Hope and love broke down the barriers between warring nations and, for that moment at least, all were one family.

That’s what the Christ of Christmas came to bring this cruel world of ours – peace on earth and good will to people. Because He came to redeem His people, Christmas brings warmth to our hearts, kindness to our lips and charity to our wallets and purses.

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The Christ of Christmas has the power to transform human society. **(Click)** Whenever a baby is born in a family, in most instances, that baby is planned for and eagerly awaited and usually comes with great promise. As those new parents stare into his or her beautiful eyes and see the coming days of “ma-ma” and “da-da”, they do so with awareness that, before they even know it, they will be sending that child as a grown adult into the world. The joy of having a new baby in the house is not simply the joy of one individual moment in time but the anticipation of a lifetime of love and laughter, heartache and growth.

(Click) So it was with the coming of Christ. The promised peace on earth and goodwill to all people has not fully come, but every time we light the Advent candles or decorate our homes with lights, every time we lift our voices to sing those wonderful Christmas carols or read those and read those ancient prophecies of the coming Messiah, we are affirming that **(Click)** even though this world still stands in dire need of saving, the Savior has come and because He has come, there is hope.

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Senator John McCain spent 5 ½ years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam in the 1960’s. During that time, he was frequently tortured or held in solitary

confinement. He reports that his lowest point came on Christmas Eve 1969. McCain was giving up hope of ever getting out of Vietnam alive. To compound his homesickness, the captors played the song "I'll Be Home for Christmas" over and over again on the PA system.

Just then, McCain heard tapping on his cell wall. This was the communication code the POW's used to communicate with one another. On the other side of the wall was Ernie Bruce, a Marine who had been imprisoned four years earlier. In spite of his dire situation, Bruce was tapping out, "We'll all be home for Christmas soon. God bless America." These simple words of comfort restored John McCain's hope.

The message of Christmas is always one of hope. This world still needs saving, but God began that process of salvation two thousand years ago with the birth of the Babe in Bethlehem. Christmas elevates us from this dire world to hope for a better world to come. Amen.