

Title: Living in the light of CHRISTmas  
Date: January 1, 2023  
Subject: We should live lives focused on Jesus all year long.  
Scripture: Luke 2:19, 46 - 52

Did you notice, as soon as Christmas was over, Christmas music evaporated from the radio, including the Christian stations, the air was out of the inflatable Santas, wise men and T-Rexes impersonating as elves? Pull the plug. Turn the page. One person noted how quickly people revert to pre-Christmas behavior: “Children who last week were helpful and sweet... Have mouths that are sassy and rooms less than neat... Those people with faces that smiled forth like elves... Are now once again just their grouchy old selves” (Candice Williams).

People were ready to move on, return to “normalcy.”

I believe we are among those who aren't ready simply to move on. In my search for Christmas songs, I found some with titles that express this desire: “Christmas Everyday” (Unspoken) and “I Don't Want Christmas to End” (Zach Williams).

We don't stash away Jesus with the wrapping paper and decorations until next December. It doesn't mean we leave the decorations up all year round, although several have joked about it so we could rename the church Triple C - Campbellsport Christmas Church...or something like that. It doesn't mean we'll sing Christmas songs every Sunday or Mary, Joseph and the baby in the manger will be dominant in the sermons.

We don't want to move on because we don't treat what happened in the sleepy town of Bethlehem over 2000 years ago as a little episode of history. We understand the significance of what Jesus did by coming to earth was merely the beginning. It's not about celebrating Christmas everyday as it's about celebrating Christ everyday...living in the light of “CHRIST”mas.

Though we won't be using Christmas texts throughout the year, we are going to dip our toes for a moment into the Biblical narrative of Christ's birth to look at a prominent person. It's Mary...after Jesus had been born, the shepherds had visited and gone back to their flocks.

Read Luke 2:19.

Mary treasured and pondered, conserved and conversed. She conserved - kept these things: the words of the angel about the son that would be born to her, Joseph's reaction, the birth experience, the visit of the shepherds, the whole matter – at the forefront, close to her where she could quickly and easily access them.

She conversed, first with herself. The meaning of the original word translated as pondered in English is to converse, consult, consider, remember and even dispute. Dispute adds an intriguing element of Mary debating with herself about what happened and their meaning as she tried to determine exactly what it all meant.

This was Mary's life as she watched Jesus grow up. Jesus is playing with the neighborhood kids and the moms are engaged in conversation about their husbands, taxes and who knows what. A sight or sound triggered Mary's brain and she drifted into her own little world. She appeared lost to others who might ask, “Mary, what

were you thinking about?” How could she explain? She probably shrugged it off. She was treasuring and pondering.

The only slice of life we have about Jesus from when he was a toddler until he began his ministry is found in Luke 2. He's 12 and on a trip with Joseph and Mary to the temple in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. This was their normal activity every year in obedience to the Old Testament law.

This visit when was different. When Joseph and Mary started for home, they assumed their son was somewhere in the traveling party of relatives and friends because people traveled together for the experience.

That evening they looked for him, at first calmly and then more frantically, checking with family and friends, but Jesus was nowhere to be found. It was kind of like the moment from the movie *Home Alone* when the mother finally realizes son Kevin isn't with them. Mary and Joseph naturally would be frightened and puzzled about where Jesus was.

They hurried back to Jerusalem. They searched, retracing their steps -- where they'd stayed, where they'd visited, where they'd eaten and finally found Jesus in the temple. How did they respond. Read Luke 2:48.

Mary and Joseph were anxious, worried. Sounds natural. Mary wanted an explanation. Sounds like a pretty normal reaction. How could Jesus, their son, treat them in such a manner?

Jesus' response is in v. 49. READ. Jesus wasn't being a sassy youth or pulling rank as God. He merely stated he understood his identity and his personal connection with God the Father since he was God the Son. If they had stopped to think, they would have come to the natural conclusion where Jesus would be... “Of course. The temple. Why didn't we think of that?” Jesus had been listening to the teachers, asking questions and people were amazed at his understanding and his answers (vv. 46, 47).

Joseph and Mary didn't understand what they saw and heard. They took Jesus back home to Nazareth where he was obedient to them. We have additional information at the end of the v. 51. READ.

The word translated “treasured” is closely connected to the one in v. 19 but has an added stress not evident in English versions. It means to keep safe, hold fast and watch thoroughly. Mary protected these moments and memories like the gold in Fort Knox. She captured them and wasn't giving away the key to anybody. She was keeping her eyes wide open, watching with an eagle eye, as Jesus continued to grow in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (v. 52).

We're to be like Mary -- have wide open eyes so we can focus on Christ - treasure and ponder, conserve and converse. Conserve. Keep what we know in a safe place, under lock and key, protect, because we value what we've seen and know about Jesus. Don't let anyone steal them from us. Don't let life steal them from us.

There may be backlash from people who think it's silly for us to spend so much time thinking or talking about Christ, that we're too old or sophisticated for that kind of stuff. We'll have to choose who will be in control -- the opinions of people or what the Lord thinks. That's one of the costs we may have to pay if we want to keep Christ front and center and keep our eyes fixed on him. Other costs may include giving up some of our time that we give to other interests.

Converse. Talk to ourselves about them. If we're ever accused of talking to ourselves, we could always respond "It's nice to have an intelligent conversation with somebody." We also converse with others, share what we know and learn from others of what they know and have experienced.

Verses in Hebrews address our objective. Read Hebrews 12:2, 3.

The first command is to fix our eyes, to look. It means to see distinctly, have the ability to see clearly and think about. This can be aided by asking basic questions like who, what, where, when, why, and how. How did Jesus live his life? What did he do? What was important to him? The goal for us is to understand his life and then live like him, love like him, do what he did, copy him, make his priorities our priorities.

Fixing our eyes on Jesus includes looking away from what we had been looking so we can pay attention. There are lots of competitors for our attention, including good things that can be distractions.

There are various versions of how to put rocks, pebbles, sand and water in a jar. If water is first poured in, then sand, then pebbles and the big rocks. It wouldn't work, just make a mess. Need to use the opposite order – first rocks, then pebbles, sand and could still pour in water.

The point isn't there's always room to cram more into our lives. The take-away is if we don't put the Lord in first, our lives are going to be messier than they need to be. We need to take care of the first priority – the relationship with the Lord. When that's squared away, we'll have an easier time with all the other things like family, job, relationships. Life may still get messy, but we have the solid rock in the center to help stabilize us.

The second command is to consider. It means to think upon, consider attentively, contemplate, ponder. We're to use our brain cells and gray matter, actively engage our mental faculties. Our spiritual journeys aren't a matter of spiritual osmosis where something somehow gets into us because we happened to bump into somebody who's a follower of Jesus Christ. There's something to be gained by exposure to and being in the presence of other believers, but if we're serious about growing, we need to get our brains in gear to think on and grapple with God's Word.

A reason is given for why we're to fix our eyes on and consider Jesus. It's so we won't grow weary and lose heart. Pretty good reason, isn't it? I don't know of anyone who says, "I want to grow weary and lose heart." We don't want that to happen and the Lord God doesn't want it either. He knows this world is going to be tough. There are going to be horribly difficult situations. But in and through it all, he reminds us he is the God of comfort, He is with us and we can always depend upon him even when we encounter the darkest and fiercest storm. Remember? He's the Solid Rock.

Earlier, the book of Hebrews gave a similar reminder (Hebrews 4:14 - 16). Jesus is described as the great high priest, the bridge that enables us to get to God, the one who represents us before God. He's able to sympathize with our weaknesses as he has went through everything we have gone through and will go through. He was tempted in every way we are but with one monumental difference – He didn't give in to sin. Based on these truths, we can "approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

God has provided and will provide mercy and grace. His supply will never run out. God treats us in ways we don't deserve and doesn't treat us in ways we do deserve. Really good news, right? He acts in love and kindness toward us. He isn't a stern ruler who seeks to impart punishment on anyone who dares come near him. He is love. He seeks to encourage and not discourage his children.

What do we see when we look at Jesus? He's the goal and object of our faith as he is its beginning and he's the one who will bring it to completion. He is not just the core but the totality. We have nothing without him. We have everything with him.

We see that he endured the horrors of the cross and opposition from sinful men. He did this because he was looking beyond the immediate to the ultimate. He knew there was joy up ahead.

How was he able to act this way? He spent time with the Father. We may think that would have been unnecessary. After all, hadn't he spent all of eternity past with God the Father up to the moment when he came to earth? There was plenty of "time" to understand the Father's wishes, programs and desires. And Jesus wasn't just fully human on earth, but he was also fully God.

That's not the way it worked. Jesus was dependent on the Father. He talked with and listened to the Father. Jesus prayed at important events: when he began his ministry (Luke 3:21–22); before choosing his 12 disciples (Luke 6:12), before feeding 5,000 (Luke 9:16) 4,000 (Matthew 15:36); when he was transfigured in his glory before his disciples (Luke 9:28, 29), at his friend Lazarus' tomb (John 11), the night before he was betrayed and crucified (John 17, Luke 22:39 - 44), and as he was dying on the cross, he talked to his Father about feeling forsaken, forgiveness of those involved in putting him to death and committing his spirit to the Father (Matthew 27: 46, Luke 23: 34, 46).

But Jesus didn't just wait for the "big stuff" to happen and then pray. He made it a priority to spend time with the Father. "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (Luke 5:16). "He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. When evening came, He was there alone" (Matthew 14:23). "Early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up and slipped out to a solitary place to pray" (Mark 1:35). "In those days Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and He spent the night in prayer to God (Luke 6:12).

If Jesus, the Son of God, the one who had the closest, most intimate connection anybody possibly could have with God the Father, needed to spend time with the Father, don't you think we need to as well?

How do we do that? The main way God talks to us is his Word. It's his voice that communicates to us. We need to soak up his Word so we can absorb the great and grand story of God's saving work.

Along the way we'll hear about familiar people like Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, Noah and the flood, Abraham, the 12 disciples, Paul. There are less familiar people with tremendous stories like Mephibosheth, Epaphras, Onesimus and Philemon, siblings Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ammi and a talking donkey.

The Bible is an honest record. We'll see how God works through stubborn people like Jonah and flawed people like Moses and Peter. We'll see how he comes to the aid of those who struggle with profound problems like Hannah and that same Moses who "regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as greater value than

the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward... He persevered because he saw him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:26, 27).

If you expect to find perfect people when you read the Bible, you need to read another book. People in the Bible are far from perfect but God used them -- Gideon had his fears, Jacob caused all sorts of family problems, David in his greed desired to possess what didn't belong to him and his pleasure-seeking son Solomon. We'll see people who failed like Cain and Saul and others who were faithful to the end as they looked beyond this world to a better kingdom, who “did not receive the things promised; They only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth...they were longing for a better country - a heavenly one” (Hebrews 11:13, 16). They lived by faith in God. They believed what God said is true and acted based on that.

The difference was made by who or what people were focusing on. It's like a child holding a hand of a parent as they step into the ocean waves which splash and lash at their feet. The child is able to withstand them. But who has the power? Is it by the child's strength? Or, is it the parent with feet firmly planted who has the power to hold on to the child?

What do we gain as we take time to read and study God's word which is described as more precious than gold and sweeter than honey (Psalm 19:10) and has the promise of “in keeping them there is great reward (Psalm 19:11)?

Jean finished her gift for our grandson of giving him the Bible she'd read during the year and made comments each day. She included five \$20 bills in various places. As Caleb opened the gift she mentioned there was money in it, possibly an added incentive to read. His eyes got big when he saw one.

Not sure how much monetary enticement he needed. After Christmas we found out he had noticed his mom's study Bible and said he'd like one. Tiffani said she couldn't turn down a request like that even though she'd already purchased all the planned gifts for him. She got him one and we saw a picture of him just beaming with his second brand new Bible.

As we read and study we'll gain insights about ourselves – why we do what we do and hope for – as we see ourselves in the stories of people, the principles and commands from God. It reveals the path to life and gives truths that will guide our lives.

Most importantly we'll encounter God himself, the one who is from everlasting to everlasting, who is love himself, who reached out to people so they could be with him forever instead being in an eternity of punishment. You want to talk about love? His compassions never fail (Lamentations 3:22). Love is heard in the voice of Jesus saying, “I love you. I've come to serve, to seek and to save the lost. I am with you, I am for you. I will never leave you.”

Going on a God hunt isn't as difficult as the “Where's Waldo?” searches. They can be extremely challenging as you search and search. God isn't like that. He wants to be found and is hiding in plain sight. It's a much more rewarding adventure.