

SUNDAY 10TH DECEMBER 2023

The Heart of Christmas.

Slide 1: The heart is referred to in many songs, going way back until the present day. Do any of you remember titles like 'Heart of Gold', 'A Good Heart', 'My Heart Will go on Loving You', and 'Your Cheating Heart'. That's because the heart is at the centre of all life.

One of the meanings given by the Cambridge Dictionary for the word 'Heart' goes like this: "The central or most important part" (of a matter). That's how we come to the term "Let's get to the heart of the matter".

I would like to share 3 important characteristics that I consider to be at the heart of Christmas.

1)The Heart of Christmas – Giving

"For God so loved the world that He GAVE His one and only Son..." (John 3:16)

Illustration: Three chained prisoners were brought before a medical missionary at a leper colony. Horrified at the sight of the chains eating into their wounded flesh, the missionary ordered that the chains be removed, overriding the protests of the guards. He thereafter lovingly treated their wounds.

A few days later, the missionary had to travel on an overnight trip. Although concerned about the safety of his wife and child, after prayer, he started his journey. The following morning, when his wife opened the house windows, she was surprised to find the

three men on her porch. Hearing that her husband was away, they had spent the entire night, guarding the family! (Adapted from a Devotional for Men).

Christmas is a season for giving, whether it is in the form of gifts, money, time or even love, as exemplified by the Missionary and also the Magi in **Matthew 2:11**. We generally treasure the gifts we receive at Christmas time because they are special. At the same time we are encouraged to be givers, knowing that Jesus said'

"It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Like the missionary who gave of his love and received an unexpected reward, when we give, it is amazing how God blesses us back in return, as I have often experienced!

Let's remember that on the first Christmas morn, God gave us His very best! John says,

"This is how God showed His love for us: He sent His one and only Son...that we might live through Him" (1 John 4: 9).

Because God gave, millions have encountered His love, His salvation and His blessings throughout history.

Let's ask Jesus for a new heart of generosity this year as we spread the love and goodness of God lavishly! The only blessing some people may receive during Christmas, could well be from you!! Maybe you can pray that the Lord will direct you to a family or a child that you can bless with a large heart of generosity this Christmas. No gift we give however can ever outdo the greatest gift given by God in the form of His Son!

2) The Heart of Christmas – Family

“Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19)

A vital part of our Christmas celebrations is the time spent with family, friends and neighbours, reminiscing of days gone by and sharing memories of God’s goodness to one another. It’s also such a pleasant sight to see a few more people walking into church on Christmas day because this is where they belong – God’s family.

We see a beautiful family portrait on the night that Jesus was born. Luke 2:16 says that when the shepherds came to Bethlehem,

“They... found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger”.

I’m sure there was much prayer and praise echoing from the manger! Verse 19 shows that Mary was building a storehouse of precious memories in her heart. She would need to relive and be strengthened by those memories, many times over, in the days ahead!

Mary and Joseph clearly built a strong, godly family although at times, some family members couldn’t grasp the Mission that Jesus was a part of. I strongly feel that much of the Lord’s Parable illustrations were crafted when journeying with or learning from His parents. His brother James too, later became an influential church leader.

This year, can we build some precious Christmas memories with our family? Can we strengthen and encourage one another? Can we pray together for God's will to be perfected in each life? Can we heal a strained relationship? God loves families and we need to treasure all the precious memories He gives us! We could also befriend someone who has no family to celebrate with at Christmas time. Let's pray for our family to receive special grace this Christmas that will unfold many beautiful moments.

3) The Heart of Christmas – Humility

“He (Jesus) humbled Himself” (Philippians 2:8)

At the heart of the Christmas message, is humility. It speaks of how the mighty Son of God, took on a human form, and came down to earth in extremely humbling circumstances. He was born in a manger; not a palace. His parents were possibly peasants, not the rich of society. The message of His birth was announced to humble shepherds and not to those in the seats of power. His birth and His very life, showed a level of humility never seen before.

The Bible compares arrogance to the sin of idolatry and warns us repeatedly about pride. (Remember the song that said, ‘It's hard to be humble, cause I'm perfect in every way')? James says,

***“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (4:6),
while Jesus promises, “whoever humbles himself will be
exalted” (Matthew 23:12).***

As we approach Christmas, let's ask God to give us the same attitude of humility that was in Christ Jesus. The Father exalted Jesus to the highest place and gave Him the Name above every name.!

Take some time to consider your heart – the places that occupy it; the dreams; goals; idols that may be placed there.

Let me share a story: it is called “Rooms to Rent” and I want you to consider the rooms you have in your heart. What occupies them? Is God in there – somewhere? In the corner? Down the bottom? Squashed between other things in your life? Or does God occupy all of your heart?

Slide 1 – empty heart.

God was walking the streets, looking for a home for His Son. He knocked on my door. Well, I suppose I could let Him rent the little spare bedroom, I thought. God read my thoughts: “I was looking to boy,” He said.

“Oh, I don't think I really want to sell,” I replied. “I need the place for myself you see. But You could use the spare bedroom, the rent's quite low. Why don't you come in and have a look?”

So, He came in and He looked around. “I like it.” He said, “I'll take it on your own terms.”

Slide 2 – Heart showing spare bedroom.

Once He was settled in, I began to wonder whether I'd been a bit mean. There He was, cooped up in that little spare bedroom. God

must have been having similar thoughts because He was there again, at my door.

“Would you have any more space now, do you think?” He asked gently.

“Well, I’ve been thinking, and I could offer Your Son an extra room to rent now.”

“Thank you,” said God. “I’ll take the extra room. Maybe you’ll decided to give My Son more room later. Meanwhile, I like what I see.

Slide 3 – Extra room

Time went on. I was still feeling a bit uneasy about this transaction. “I’d like to give you some more room,” I kept telling God, “but you see, it’s a bit difficult. I need some space for ME”

“I understand,” God kept saying. “I’ll wait. I like what I see.”

Eventually I decided to offer God the whole of the top floor. He accepted gracefully, on behalf of His Son. “Well, I can spare it really” I told him. “I’d really like to let you have the whole house, but I’m not sure.....

“I understand,” said God. “I’ll wait. I like what I see.”

Slide 4 – Top floor.

A bit more time went by and there was God again, at my door. “I just want you to know,” He said, “that I’m still very interested in

buying your house. I wouldn't put you out. We'd work it out together. Your house would be mine and My Son would live here."

"Actually," He added. "you'd have more space than ever before."

"I really can't see how that could be true," I replied, hesitating on the doorstep.

"I know," said God. "And to be honest, I can't really explain it. It's something you must discover for yourself. It only happens if you let My Son have the whole house."

"A bit risky," I said.

"Yes, but try me," encouraged God.

"I'm not sure. I'll let you know."

"I'll wait," said God. "I like what I see."

Final slide – heart full of God.

As I close this sermon on 'The Heart of Christmas', let me share the 3 main points once again. They are:

1. Giving
2. Family
3. Humility

May the Lord help us to consider and take the necessary decisions in these 3 areas. God bless you!