

## **Sermon: 2020/12/24 (Christmas Eve) - *Isaiah 9:2-7a; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Matthew 1:18-25*\_BTR**

### **Putting Jesus at the Center**

There used to be a rather limited selection of items (available) with which to decorate a Christmas tree:

baubles,

tinsel,

*fairy-lights(!)*, of course;

an angel or a star for the top.

And little else besides.

My mum being Swiss, I remember too that we also had (growing up) some Alpine, wooden, hand-painted drummer-boys or something.

Miniature nutcrackers perhaps.

But that was it.

These days, however, the array and selection is *incredible!*

This year, I've seen ornaments of just about *everything*:

*llamas*, for example.

Suddenly, llamas are *everywhere*.

And some are very sweet - like this one:

made out of felted wool;

he wears a cute, colourful saddle, and has streamers on his ears like those you might find on the handlebars of a BMX (bicycle).

*But why?!*

Why are stores all over the country suddenly pushing (on consumers) a creature unique to the Andean mountains of South America - *Peru* - for a celebration centered on an event that transpired in ancient *Palestine?* (in the Middle East.)

That's strange, no?

Odd, objectively speaking.

I've seen recently dinosaurs too - to hang on the Christmas tree:

this one (here) is made from glass - its quite delicate(!),

and he has a little red "Santa" hat on his head.

I've seen sauropods and stegasaurids.

*This* one (that I was foolish to buy), is a tyrannosaurus - judging by his tiny arms and how few fingers he uses to clutch his tiny Christmas gift.

Now, again, as the llama, unless I'm *horribly* mistaken, I don't remember the Bible mentioning this being at the Savior's birth - giant, scaly prehistoric lizards paying homage in the stable.

Did they come after the shepherds but... before the wisemen?

And could they even fit inside?

(With their huge, hulking bodies.)

I imagine that "T-Rex," had he been there on that cold night, bowing to his creator in fragile human form, would have given the cows and donkeys the fright of their *life!*

*Massive* white teeth like two rows of kitchen knives poised over the manger in an awe-struck smile.

Finally - and this one really might be the pièce de résistance - I found this glittery *burrito* on sale too.

It's also carefully made out of glass.

You can see the pinto beans and the lettuce-leaves...

It's hilarious, right?

*Comedically* awful.

What's going on?!

Why this new niche for Christmas ornaments such as this (Mexican) monstrosity?

Well, it seems inevitable that as our society and culture become steadily de-Christianized, a great, undeniable gap would begin to open up as to the meaning; the rationale;

*the reason* to celebrate Christmas at all.

And into this "gap"; to fill this void, other content; other ["*gods*"] besides the Christ-child must emerge.

After all, "nature abhors a vacuum," it is said.

And llamas, dinosaurs and burritos on our Christmas trees symbolise how, more and more, Jesus Himself is *also* missing from the *lives* of many Americans.

*From their hearts.*

*Quite* clearly, Jesus isn't *central* for many of us as maybe He once was.

He has been *displaced*.

And will this be without consequence?

Will there be no comeuppance?

Will we be happier?

More prosperous?

Will we attain to eternity without Him?

Or must we each make a *conscious* choice to restore Christ?

Joseph - his adoptive father, we see, (in our text tonight), was faced with exactly this choice - a choice whether to accept Christ at the center of his life (with Mary), or walk away.

And, make no mistake, it would have been more convenient *not* to raise "the Messiah."

That is to say, it would have been more convenient *not* to raise a son which wasn't

his own.

It would have been easier *not* to have contended with the whispered gossip in the marketplace;

the sideways glances from neighbors and the barely concealed smiles of schadenfreude from the other villagers aimed at him as a suspected cuckold; the sudden silence as he entered the synagogue and the looks of embarrassment from the pious there, as if caught with crumbs in their beards from the last chocolate-chip cookie that was supposed to be in the cookie-jar.

Joseph *surely* had hoped to have his own children.

He surely had had plans and ambitions:

To marry his pretty young betrothed, and to run a carpentry business.

But he decided to put Jesus at the center.

At the center of his purpose;

at the center of his meaning.

And it was a choice he had to remake continually, every day, to keep on putting Jesus at the center.

To go to Bethlehem.

Then in Egypt.

And then in Nazareth (again).

And we too must "*continually*" do the same.

Every morning; every Christmas - choose to put Jesus and following Him at the center of our everything.

At the center of our careers;

at the center of our marriages;

at the center of our hopes and dreams;

at the center of our citizenship - *at the center of who we are*.

Forever remembering that only *He* was born 'bringing salvation for all people'.

Glory to the Father...