



## Living Hope Bible Church

*Where hope comes to life, and the Son always shines.*

December 2, 2023

Dear Church Family and Friends:

Now that Thanksgiving is over, we have officially entered into the Christmas season. The busyness of all that goes into an American Christmas celebration is now upon us. With this comes both stress and potential depression. This can often be a difficult time for many as we often encounter the compulsion to give beyond our means and plan beyond our emotional resources. We can also fall trap to feelings of discontentment and regret. Amazingly, Americans will spend nearly \$800 billion dollars this Christmas and fall further into debt. Consumerism has overtaken the traditional Christmas celebration in America and has ironically turned the peace of Christmas into a nightmare of anxiety and dread.

As we enter another holiday season, I believe it's crucial that we adjust our focus and expectations so that we don't fall trap to these false allurements. Although giving is a wonderful thing, it's vital that we learn to focus on the true gifts of Christmas this year. What are these gifts, you may ask? They are far different and far more desired than the newest gadgets that fill our stores and inundate commercials at this time of the year. They are the priceless gifts of love, joy, peace, and hope that Christ's birth and life provide us. They all come out of an awareness of God's immense love expressed in His desire to be with us, in us, and for us. Thankfully Jesus shattered the wall of separation, sin had erected between us and God. Jesus' incarnation miraculously merged humanity with divinity and abolished the enmity that had existed between humanity and the divine. As the very Prince of Peace, God brought us reconciliation with Himself and with one another.

I often marvel at the biblical account of Christ's birth. How could Almighty God humble Himself to such a low estate? And how could God leave the realms of glory to come to us? This is the most amazing love story of all, and it speaks of God's amazing grace in stooping and reaching out to us in our desperate state of helplessness and rebellion. The joy of knowing this grace is inexpressible and should overwhelm and overtake all of our disappointments and discontentment.

Instead of keeping Christ in the manger as nothing more than a mere sentimental symbol, we need to celebrate the full story of Christmas. Jesus not only went on to die for our sin at the cruel cross of Calvary, but He ascended and has promised to come and take us to be with Him in glory. This last gift of Christmas entails the comforting hope or assurance of our future deliverance and triumph in Him. The Lamb of God will someday return as the very Lion of Judah. We cannot allow the hardships and toils of this life to tarnish or diminish the rich inheritance that awaits us in our Savior and Lord.

These four gifts of Christmas found in the love, joy, peace, and hope of our Lord are priceless and should be the real focus of our celebration this Christmas season. As a church we will be highlighting these gifts through our annual Advent Wreath tradition. This Sunday will mark the beginning of this special four-week series and will culminate in our Christmas Eve service. With this in mind, I want to encourage each of you to join us for these services and to consider how you may want to invite other friends and family as well. This time of the year provides us with a great opportunity to share the good news of Jesus' love and salvation.

In closing, I want to remind you that the greatest blessing of Christmas is found in the gift of God's presence with us. As our Emmanuel, Jesus came to forever join us with Himself. As this name indicates, "God is with us". Remarkably because of Christmas, we never have to fear being alone or somehow separated from God. Through our faith and trust in Jesus to save us we have been reunited with God and assured of His constant protection and eternal presence in our lives. As Paul tells us, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). Surely, no one, or anything can remove us from God's loving embrace! The wonderful story of Christ's birth is far deeper and far richer than any of the shallow gifts we may covet this holiday season. It is my prayer that each of us might embrace the true gifts of Jesus this Christmas as we abandon the counterfeit gifts our world offers us.

I want to wish each of you a blessed Christmas season and a renewed sense of the love, joy, peace, and hope of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Your Servant In Christ,  
*Pastor Mark*

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