

## ***Christmas Day Sermon 4 by Bishop Michael Hawkins***

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By the Right Reverend Michael W. Hawkins

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I hear more and more complaining from Christians about Christmas, and I worry that we sound like grumpy killjoys. One common complaint is that there is no room for Jesus left in Christmas. While we may lament the loss of access Christians have to present Jesus, and to share the Gospel in our society, we cannot forget that there was no room in the inn, that Christmas is as much about Jesus being locked out, kicked out and chased out, as it is about his coming to us and being received. We ought not to be too surprised to see Jesus left out in the cold or relegated to the shed, yet he still comes to the humble place and heart that will receive him.

The other concern people express is about how children really need to be taught that Christmas is about giving and not receiving. Well, I want to say that those spoiled little darlings may be right after all, and we grown-ups may have it all wrong. Christmas is really about receiving, and only secondarily about giving. While it is more blessed to give than to receive, there is

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a part of us that knows that this is a rather adult view of things.  
We only learn to give by first receiving.

So I want to say loud and clear two things:

1. It is all about the gifts.

2. It's all about what you get.

1. Well, it's not really all about the gifts, but about The Gift - the gift of Jesus Christ, which God offers to all the world.

2. And secondly, it is about receiving, not really about what we give, but what we receive, for the gift is given but it must be received, accepted.

So Christmas is about the Gift and about Receiving.

We read today the Holy Gospel, the Holy Good News, of Jesus' birth. Saint Luke paints for us a picture of Jesus' humble beginnings, born in a barn to a scared young woman without family, friend or midwife, and laid in a feeding trough. This is the story of Jesus' birth, but by the angel we learn with the Shepherds that this child is born for us and to us, and that he is

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Christ the Lord.

Matthew, Luke and John all tell of the coming of Jesus in different ways. St. John, though, does not tell the story, but goes straight to its meaning and significance. He says of Jesus, “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.”

Saint John tells us that Christmas is about the incarnation of the Son of God, the Word being made flesh and dwelling among us. It is about the birth of Jesus and how by believing and receiving him, we may be born again as God's children. It is about recognizing, coming to know something uniquely divine in him, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Christmas is about how God is to be received and

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believed in flesh and blood, in Jesus Christ. The gift is for you and what God gives is nothing less than himself.

*He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.*

John is most clear in identifying that Jesus, born of Mary, is the Creator of the world become a creature, the Word made flesh. Since the creation did not recognize its Creator, he came unto his own.

*He came unto his own, and his own received him not.*

This is the single sentence of judgment and condemnation John offers. The great offence, the ultimate sin and shame he puts forth, is this rejection and refusal. Did no one in Bethlehem ever notice, did no one take thought or care, could no one tell what desperate straits they were in? The whole Christmas story is told there by John. He records the rejection, no room in the inn, Herod's murderous rage, in one short phrase: "he came unto his

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own and his own received him not.” John means that when God came to his own people, they did not accept what was offered, they did not welcome or receive him, and they refused the gift. The whole story of Jesus is the record and summation of our failure to recognize God’s divinity and our common humanity. We do not recognize God as God, and we do not receive one another as human beings. They knew him not, they received him not. This is the whole story of sin and of Jesus’ earthly life.

*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Here, John gives the meaning of Christmas short and sweet. It is about receiving and believing Jesus. Jesus was born that we might be born again, born a human child that we might be re-born the children of God. This happens, as St. John so succinctly puts it, by believing and receiving, and that is what Christmas is about, believing and receiving Jesus Christ. What

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does it mean to receive Jesus Christ? It is to accept and welcome him, as the gift of God.

John talks about believing on the name of Jesus, by which he means acknowledging Jesus for who he really is. What is his Name? He is the Word made flesh. To believe on his name is to know him as God of God, born of the Virgin Mary. His name is Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins, his name is Immanuel - God with us - and he is the King of the Jews. Believing on his name means trusting and acknowledging him for who he is - your God and Saviour.

By this faith and acknowledgement, by this believing and receiving, we ourselves become the children of God. When we recognize the true dignity of this child in the manger, the Son of God, we come to know our new dignity in him, the children of God. Christ's birth is our rebirth, a brand new, wonderful beginning for all of humanity.

*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we*

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*beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.*

Here in Jesus, born of Mary, the Word made flesh, we recognize by faith something uniquely divine, something and someone full of divine grace and truth. In him we know God.

Actions speak louder than words, so they say, and there may be some truth in that, especially to people who are lost in their own noise and business, who have become deaf to the Word of God. So the Word was made flesh. God speaks most loudly by this act, by the incarnation, by the birth of Jesus Christ, being born as one of us for all of us, the Word become a wordless babe, to be received and believed.

Actions speak louder than words, and the Word will be silent again, in his cross and passion, becoming obedient to death, dying as one of us for all of us. God's message to the world is Christ crucified, to be received and believed.

Christmas is to receive and believe Jesus Christ the Lord, the Word made flesh. It is to be touched and changed by this gift

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of God, of God giving himself to us and for us. It is all to you and for you. Receive and believe.