

Christmas is a time for families, a time to get together with the people that we know and love. Christmas can be a great time for some. But it can also be a very tough time for others, especially for those who are far away from family and friends, have a broken relationship with their family, have lost a loved one or have no real family at all. But it doesn't need to be that way. For the past two Wednesdays we've been talking about the first Christmas family, about Mary, Joseph and Jesus. But the Christmas family is not limited to them. The Christmas family is open to you and me and to all who believe that Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of the world.

Some people today want to do away with Christmas, at least as a national holiday or public celebration. In the state of Washington, the atheistic organization that calls themselves the "Freedom from Religion Foundation" got permission to put up an anti-Christian sign next to the Nativity Scene at the capitol building. The sign reads in part, "**Religion is but myth and superstition that hardens hearts and enslaves minds.**" And you thought Ebenezer Scrooge was bad! The American Humanist Association is running bus ads in Washington DC that read, "**Why believe in god? Just be good for goodness sake.**"

As much as these signs might bother us, we shouldn't be too surprised to see them. An anti-Jesus attitude has been around since the very first Christmas. The reality is while a few said "Yes!" to Jesus, most ignored him, some said no to him, and one in particular openly opposed him. Think about it:

The Inn Keeper said No! The owner of the stable said Yes.

The people of Bethlehem ignored Jesus. The shepherds said Yes.

The people in the temple didn't recognize Jesus. Simeon and Anna said Yes.

Herod the Great tried to kill the baby Jesus. The Wise Men said Yes.

Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, Simeon, Anna, and the wise men all said Yes to Jesus. Christmas was real for them. Christmas isn't really Christmas until we say Yes to Jesus, until we take him into our hearts and let Him be the Lord of our lives. You can celebrate Christmas without a single present and even without a tree, but you can't celebrate Christmas without Christ. You can celebrate Christmas without going on a trip or having anyone come to visit you, but you can't celebrate Christmas without walking with God in faith, without making the journey to see Jesus.

Could it be that some people missed out on the first Christmas because they didn't think they needed Jesus. That was certainly the case for many people after Jesus grew up and began his ministry. The Pharisees and religious elite in Israel were "self righteous" people. They thought of themselves as good people. They thought that they were so good at keeping God's laws and observing the rituals of their religion that they had it made. They thought of themselves as better

than anyone else. They didn't need a Savior. So when Jesus came on the scene calling people to repentance and faith, they were threatened by him and offended by his words. Eventually they turned against Him and plotted to kill him. They acted like Herod the Great, trying to kill Jesus before he could complete the work of redemption, paying the price for our sin.

Could it be that the Shepherds received Jesus because they knew they needed the Savior? Shepherds were social outcast, part of the lower class. They were the ones who dropped everything to go see Jesus. They were motivated by the words of the angel to go see this amazing, wonderful gift of God's Son for themselves. Their pride didn't hold them back. They realized their need for help and said Yes to Jesus.

In just a week families all over the world will be celebrating Christmas. I'm looking forward to having Stephen and Suzanne home for Christmas. You may be looking forward to your family gathering this Christmas, too. Enjoy your Christmas family gathering, but remember that Christmas is much more than just your immediate family. There is room in God's family for everyone. Don't ignore him because you're just too busy with all of the other things you think you have to do this time of the year. Make room in the inn called your heart for Jesus.

Simeon and Anna were two old people when Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the temple. They were faithful to the Lord. Out of all the babies brought to the temple, God helped them to recognize Jesus as the promised Savior. They had said yes to God their whole lives. Because of their humble faith and trust in God's promises, they were able to say Yes to Jesus.

How about you? Does your life say yes to Jesus? Is your Christmas celebration as Yes Jesus celebration? We can say yes to Jesus when we celebrate Christmas as part of God's family.

Listen to the message of the angels, the good news that Savior has come.

See Jesus for yourself. Open the eyes of faith to see God's gift.

Receive Jesus in your heart. Make room for Him to live there.

Believe that Jesus is your Lord and Savior.

Worship Him. Offer Him the gifts of your love, your time, your service.

Proceed in faith. Walk with Christ and let Him be your guide.

Christmas is a family affair. Thank God that He sent His Son into our world so that you, me and all who believe can be part of His family forever. Amen.