

## Christmas Is Tomorrow

John 1:1-14

[A sermon preached by the Rev. Stan Gockel at the First Presbyterian Church of Portland, Indiana on Christmas Day, December 25, 2016]

### I

Today is December 25—Christmas Day.

For most people, Christmas will soon be over.

All the gifts will have been exchanged...  
all the presents will have been opened...  
all the paper and boxes will have been thrown out.

All those who have visited relatives will have returned home.

The tree will be taken down  
and the decorations packed away for the year.

By next week we will have returned to the routine of our everyday lives as surely as the VISA and MasterCard bills are sent in January.

And as the holiday passes many of us will say something like,  
*“Whew! I’m glad that’s over!”*

### II

This morning I would like to present an alternate point of view.

It is a viewpoint expressed in the prayer of a college student who was asked to pray in her home church on the day after Christmas.

This is part of what she prayed:

*Help us to remember that Christmas is a star, high in the heavens, lustrous, bright and shining. Christmas is the dancing joy in a child’s face on that wonderful morning. It is a father’s smile and a mother’s*

*prayer. It is the smell of greenery in a brightly decorated room. It is the faint aroma of frankincense and myrrh...*

*Christmas is today, full of love and greeting. But most of all, Christmas is tomorrow, when the Babe in the manger grows to be a man.*

It is that last sentence that is so striking:

**But most of all, Christmas is tomorrow.**

How can that be?

How can we say that Christmas is tomorrow?

Psychotherapist Thomas Moore in his new book *The Soul of Christmas* gives us a helpful perspective.

*“On any ordinary day,” he writes, “you may suddenly realize that life is full of gifts, and you may think, ‘It’s like Christmas.’”*

*“Christmas is not just a time of year, not just a festival. It’s an archetype of life’s generosity and giving. We encounter it all year long and celebrate it at the time of the [winter] solstice.”*

Christmas, says Thomas Moore, is an event that exists both deep within history and outside of history.

Christmas is a mystery—  
     not a puzzle to be figured out  
         but a mysterious happening that transfigures life  
             and gives it meaning.

Christmas makes life merry and is worthy of our complete devotion.  
*(The Soul of Christmas, pp. 31-32)*

### III

There are some things in life that have an on-going quality to them.

Take education, for example.

When did you complete your education?

In grade school?

With your high school diploma?

When you received your bachelor's or master's degree?

Or could it be that education is meant to be a life-long process?

There certainly are points along the way that we can mark—  
like pre-school graduation,  
or high school commencement.

But the task of educating ourselves is never complete—  
it is ongoing.

There is always something more to learn...  
new vistas of knowledge to attain...  
new wisdom to acquire.

Marriage is the same way.

The wedding is the culmination of much hard work, planning, effort, and no little expense.

But the wedding ceremony is not the end of the process,  
but a new beginning.

It is the beginning of the hard work of living together as husband and wife.

One of the things I've often told couples on their wedding day is,  
*This is the day when the adventure really begins.*

Almost no one understands that on their wedding day.

But the couple soon realizes that a good marriage requires the best they can give.

The task will never be completed.

Like the life-long process of education,  
 a good marriage is never finished until the couple is parted by death.

#### IV

Christmas is like that.

As we talk and sing and surround ourselves with the symbols of the birth at Bethlehem,

it is in the hope that it will make a difference in our lives...

that its meaning will touch our living as well as our celebrating...

that it will lead to the birth of joy and peace in our individual lives,

and a new birth of peace on earth and goodwill for our world.

Christmas is today,

but for it to be real and lasting,

it must also be a part of all our tomorrows.

Thomas Moore writes that at Christmas time we don't just memorialize an event from history;

rather, we acknowledge and call to mind a deep archetypal event that can take place at any moment.

**At any moment, Jesus could be born.**

When you suddenly discover that money is not the key to happiness,  
 that friendship and love are infinitely more important,  
 Jesus is born.

When some new possibility for your life stirs within you,  
 something previously unknown and unfamiliar,  
 Jesus is born.

When you suddenly realize you can open your heart in love,  
 even though you've kept it closed out of fear for many years,  
 Jesus is born. (*The Soul of Christmas*, p. 32)

Yes, Christmas is today, but it can also be a part of all our tomorrows if we are willing to open ourselves to the soul of Christmas.

V

But Christmas will not be a part of our tomorrows unless *we are also willing to let the Baby in the manger grow up into an adult.*

The worst problem we have with Christmas—  
 worse even than all the commercialization,  
 worse than the hyped-up “war on Christmas”—  
 is how we sentimentalize the baby Jesus.

We romanticize his birth as if he is no longer a real baby,  
 the manger is some kind of special crib for babies with halos,  
 and the stable is the Bethlehem Hampton Inn.

Now I am all for making the birth a beautiful event.

But we need to find the beauty in the realism.

Frederick Buechner tells the story this way:

*Let us assume...we had been there that night when he was born...*

*The darkness would have looked like any darkness. Maybe there were a few stars, the same old stars, or the moon. For a long time, the only sound perhaps was the rough, rapid, breathing of a woman in labor.*

*If the tradition of the manger is accurate, there was the smell of hay, the great moist eyes of the cattle. The father was there, possibly a shepherd or two attracted by the light, if there was any light. There was a last cry of pain from the mother and the child was born, and then the cry of the child.*

*In the distance, maybe the lonely barking of a dog. The mother stares up at the rafters from where she is lying, too exhausted even to think of the child. Someone has taken him from her to wrap him up against the cold and darkness of the world. Maybe a mouse burrows deeper into the straw.*

Not very romantic, is it? But it's real!

Millions of women have given birth to their children under primitive circumstances like these.

And in his birth, Jesus is identified with all of the babies of the world who fight for their lives against such adverse circumstances.

If you have ever had to stay up all night with a colicky, fussy baby who wouldn't stop crying,  
     you know we're talking about real babies in a real world.

Raising two daughters forever ruined for me the beautiful carol, "Away in a Manger."

When I hear the part,  
     "The little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes,"  
     I can only respond:  
         **"HO! HO! HO!—I'll bet he did too!"**

## VI

So once we have found the real baby Jesus, what then?

Will we allow Jesus to leave the manger,  
     to grow up,  
         to become the Savior who gave his life for the world,  
         to be the Lord whom we follow and serve?

One of the favorite movies of just about everyone is Steven Spielberg's *E.T. The Extra Terrestrial*.

As you know, the movie is about a 10-year-old boy named Elliot who becomes E.T.'s friend.

Elliot protects E.T. against a hostile adult world.

At the end of the film the spaceship comes to take E.T. home.

Elliot must choose whether he will accompany E.T., whom he loves, or stay here on earth.

The choice is between living in a fantasy or living in the real world and growing up.

Even young children understood this aspect of the movie.

When interviewed by psychologists they explained that Elliot made the right decision (to stay on earth).

*“Elliot has to grow up. You can’t grow up on Jupiter, or you will stay a kid like E. T.”*

The popularity of the movie almost 35 years later indicates that it touches something deep within us.

There is something in all of us that resists growing up—  
because it means accepting greater responsibility for myself and for my world.

In a similar way there is a part of each of us that wants to keep the baby Jesus in that manger.

There he will be no trouble to us.

I can deal with a baby.

But if Jesus grows up, then so too must I!

**And I must answer his call to take up his cross and follow him.**

Ann Weems wrote:

*If there is no cross in the manger,  
there is no Christmas.  
If the Babe doesn’t become an Adult,  
then there is no Bethlehem star.  
If there is no commitment in us,  
there are no Wise Men searching.*

*If we offer no cup of cold water,  
           there is no gold, no frankincense, no myrrh.  
 If there is no spirit of alleluia,  
           there are no shepherds watching.  
 If there is no standing up, no speaking out, no risk,  
           there is no Herod, no flight into Egypt.  
 If there is no room in our inn,  
           then "Merry Christmas" mocks the Christ Child,  
           and the Holy Family is just a holiday card,  
           and God will loathe our feasts and festivals...*

*If we cannot go even now unto Golgotha,  
           there is no Christmas in us.  
 If Christmas is not **now**,  
           if Christ is not born into the everyday present,  
           then what is all the **noise** about?*

## VII

Christmas is always tomorrow...  
           whether I am willing to accept it or not.

It will always be unfinished business.

The purposes of God are only slowly achieved in our world.

Slowly...like the growth of a baby into adulthood.

Just as a marriage doesn't really begin until the honeymoon is over,  
           so Christmas begins when we leave the manger and move toward the  
           cross.

The message of Christmas is one of love, of God saying:

*I love you...  
           I love you enough to become one of you...  
           I love you enough to give my only Son that you might  
           have life.*

**Christmas is tomorrow** because it is the beginning of God's work of  
 salvation.

