

Stop to count the number of sales flyers you received since December 1<sup>st</sup>. You probably lose count. Christmas seems to be starting earlier and earlier. Barely have time to put away the pumpkins of Halloween before the flyers, commercials, and in store displays go up, then the Christmas trees come out. Christmas starting early would be a good thing except the season doesn't highlight worship opportunities, Christmas for Kids programs, or children's Christmas services at local churches. The only message getting through is a secular store bought message.

That's clearly not the message we want at Christmas. But how do we avoid it? It's everywhere. We have our own busyness and crazy schedules to keep, Christmas shopping to do, and parties to attend. Yet even among the busyness and craziness of the season I can assure you God's message is still getting out there. It has to be clearly defined among the dozens of false Christmas messages. It might take work on your part to hear it, but once you do you'll recognize it immediately...

### **God's messengers bring a clear Christmas message**

**A message of peace**

**A message of good tidings**

**A message of deliverance**

You've seen the *Coexist* bumper sticker written in different religious symbols. Islam, Judaism, Wicca, and even Christianity all share the same spotlight. The idea of course is that we all have to live together. I think there's one symbol on there that stands out as most important to the message of the bumper sticker. The o in coexist is a peace symbol. The reason I think that's probably the most important symbol for the people who make the bumper sticker is because the bumper sticker is given away by a website called Peacemonger. Without question they're looking for world peace. All religions living peacefully together. All nations of the world not fighting wars against each other. All the governments and people of the world living side by side in peace. It's a wonderful thing to wish for, but can it ever be achieved?

Parents and children love each other. If there's a relationship out there where we would expect to find peace that would be it. But for those with kids, those with parents are you fighting about something right now? Didn't get the Christmas presents you wanted and so now you're a little mad at your parents. Maybe didn't get the cooperation you wanted while traveling for Christmas and now parents are a little disappointed with your kids. Kids didn't help set the table, parents didn't understand your desire to go to a friend's house, both didn't see eye to eye on every decision. Where's the peace? Need we mention the reason why? The world may not know why, but we do. Sin is the reason. At the core your heart doesn't want to coexist with mine. Our hearts want what's best for us. Sin brings conflict because God wants our hearts, but we don't want him. As long as there's sin there will never be true peace.

God's messengers bring a clear Christmas message of peace. The war that was raging between God and human beings because of sin is over. The peace established in our relationship with God comes about by the one who came to make peace on earth. **"The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations."** The holy arm of God fights for his people. He destroys the enemies of his peaceful message. The holy arm of God gives those that believe in him peace. That holy arm of God is visible in the little one born in the manger. Today because of Jesus we have peace with God for eternity.

Define good. Your stock portfolio rebound this year so you think that's good. The unemployment ratio in this country or here in Oklahoma leveling off, that's good. Crime rate down for the fourth year in a row nationwide, that's good. Of course anyone who has stocks that continued to go down doesn't think this was such a good year. Anyone still unemployed doesn't think things are so good. And anyone who was a victim of a crime wouldn't think things were so good. Not easy to define what's good is it?

So how can we define good? **"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news...who bring good tidings."** God defines good. He can because he's objectively good in the absolute sense. What he makes is always good and what he gives is always good. All good comes from God who is good. And when he hands out good news we know it's going to be good for us. Jesus born of a virgin is good. Jesus coming to earth to take on human flesh is good. Jesus living an absolutely perfect life where you and I failed is good. Jesus paying for our sins as the substitute we needed on the cross is good. Those are good tidings, good news. Our relationship with God is good because of Jesus.

700 years before Jesus was born in Isaiah's day when a nation was captured that nation rarely survived. Most of the time the conquering nation simply absorbed the captives. When the Israelites were captured and taken into captivity no one expected them to last as Israelites. Soon they would simply be former Israelites now Babylonians. God had other plans. He continued to keep them separate. He maintained their numbers, and when the right time came he set them free. That's the reason for Isaiah saying, **"Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem."** The captives were coming home.

We don't understand captivity as well as the people Isaiah was writing to. We don't because we see ourselves as free. Free to come and go as we please. Free to vote and make decisions. Free to live where we want. But deep down we're anything but free. We can't see just how captive we are. Not one of us can make the choice to follow Christ on our own. Not one of us can break Satan's grip on our hearts. Our entire lives by nature go away from God. The scary thought is that he has every right to turn away from us. But he doesn't. Isaiah's call goes up, **"Your God reigns!"** Today we might say "your God is born." Jesus took on flesh, not so we say how cute, but so he can deliver and save us.

The Lord comforts his people and redeems them through his son. It's time to lift up voices and shout praise. The Lord has come to deliver his people. We haven't been doomed to die or live in this sin-filled world. We've been set free and assured of a better life by God who came to Bethlehem as one of us. Because Jesus Christ, the son of Mary and the son of God traded his life for yours and mine the wrath of God fell on him and not on us. The one who had every right to strike us down struck Jesus instead. He did it so he could save us. He did it so his promises to deliver us would come true.

Christmas time is the most important time to keep priorities in line and keep focus on what's important. Christmas isn't about family, gifts, or anything else. These things aren't wrong in themselves, but when they become the tagline to what Christmas is about we've lost our focus. Christmas is about one thing, the birth of Jesus. It's about God stepping into our world to bring us peace, share good tidings, and deliver us from sin. That's the clear Christmas message.