

## Daily Devotional Guide

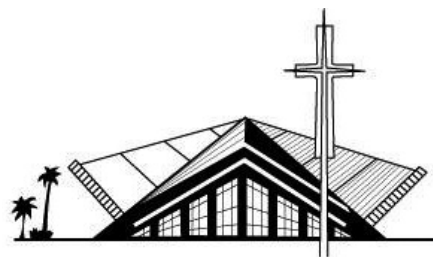
**Monday**– Read Luke 3:1-3. John the Baptist came to prepare the world for Christ. The season of Advent (“to come”) is about preparation. Our culture is always in a rush to get to Christmas. Have you noticed? Christmas music is already playing everywhere you go. But those of us who truly anticipate the birth of Christ know that we must prepare ourselves. John the Baptist reminds us that we must repent and make room for Christ before we can receive him. There can be no peace without repentance. Are you preparing yourself for Christmas?

**Tuesday** – Read Luke 3:4. John, taking his cue from the prophet Isaiah, gives us direction as to how to find the peace of Christmas. He says, “Prepare the way of the Lord.” In order to receive the peace of Christ we must prepare ourselves. For some of us this means removing clutter from our lives so that we can give our full attention to Christ. Simplicity is one of the keys to peace. Advent is a great opportunity to remove the unimportant “stuff” of our lives and reorient ourselves around what is most important. Make a list today of those unimportant thoughts and areas of your life that will no longer rob you of your precious time.

**Wednesday** – Read Luke 3:4. John tells us to “make his paths straight.” We want Christ to find a wide open path into our lives. We do not want his path to us to be crooked or broken. Therefore, some of us may need to “repair” our paths. Some of our paths are crooked with resentment and bitterness. Other paths are broken by sin. Our paths must be made straight before Christ can come in and give us peace. What kind of repairs do you need to make?

**Thursday** – Read Luke 3:5-6. Notice how many times the word “shall” appears in these two verses. 4 times we see the word “shall.” This is a powerful word that communicates certainty. These things *will* happen when we prepare and repair ourselves. For many of us our problem is not a lack of preparation or repairing; it is a lack of belief. Do you believe Christ will give you peace? If not, what is holding you back from believing?

**Friday** – Read Luke 3:6. This is a beautiful verse that expresses that Christ comes to bring us salvation. The word salvation literally means “wholeness.” This is why we experience peace when we receive Christ. We are made whole by his love. Whoever finds wholeness finds peace. If you don’t have peace in your life it is because there is something broken in your life that needs healing. Ask God to give you the wisdom to discover what is broken in your life and the courage to fix it.



### Pasadena Community Church

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## The Hope of Christmas

Sunday, November 28, 2010

Sermon by: Rev. Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor  
Scripture Lesson: Luke 1:26-38

### Where's Your Treasure?

Tom Long talks about a game he used to play as a child. As I read about it, it brought back memories because I used to play it with my sisters. It was not a board game, a card game, and it certainly was not a video game. It was a game of the imagination (isn't it sad in this day of video games and flashy toys that kids seemed to be deprived of using their imagination).

We called the game, “Where would you leave your treasure?” And it went like this. Suppose you had a large sum of money and some unexpected crisis came up and you had to leave your treasure with someone you could trust. You can't put in the bank or hide it—there is no time. The rule of the game is that you have to leave it with someone. The game was fun because you would think of everyone you knew and explore their possible character flaws and virtues, trying to figure out who you would leave your treasure with.

- Neighbor? They would steal it.
- Preacher? Probably put in the collection plate.

- Sister? Want to split it.

On it would go until you found just the right person to keep your precious treasure. This was important. Your whole treasure hinged on the trustworthiness of another person.

### Divine Version of Game

Long suggests that one way to read our scripture lesson for today is as a divine version of “Where would you leave your treasure?” God searched for some place in human life to leave his treasure. Now, God's treasure was not gold or money. It was the gospel. It was not silver; it was the good news! It was not all of the money of the world; it is the embodiment of God's saving, healing, life giving love. That is God's treasure.

Now, where in the world do you leave a treasure like that? This is the most valuable and the most fragile gift in all of the world. Put it in the wrong hands and it might be twisted, destroyed, or squandered. Where do you leave the greatest treasure in the world so that it can be protected and allowed to grow all over the world?

## Luke Tells Us

Well, the gospel of Luke wants to tell us where God would leave his treasure. Luke begins his gospel this way, "In the days of Herod, king of Judea." And we may lift our eyes from the page and say, "Now there's a possibility!" God could have left his treasure to the Herods of the world—to the politicians. This is really not that bad of an idea. After all, politicians are in charge of providing for the public, for building the schools, paving the roads, passing the laws, protecting those who can't protect themselves. And part of God's good news is political—to get rid of tyrants and let the oppressed go free, to lift up those who thirst for hunger and justice. For when a child dies of hunger in this world, something at the heart of God dies. The gospel has political implications.

But God did not leave his treasure with Herod. Because the gospel is the good news that, if there is to be justice in the world, there can only be one true king. If there is to be peace in the world, there can only be one ruler. If there is to be mercy in the world there can only be one Lord. And this ruler is not a republican, a democrat, an independent, a libertarian, or a Herod. It is Jesus Christ. God knows that absolute power corrupts absolutely and leaving the power of his treasure to a political leader means the treasure would be corrupted.

## What About Zechariah?

Well, then Luke continues and says, "In the days of Herod there was priest named Zechariah." Now, maybe that's a better idea—to leave the treasure with the holy people of the world, to the clergy, to the priests. I am a little partial to that! This makes pretty good sense. After all, clergy think holy things and perform holy deeds. Their job is theological. And if the good news is anything it is theological! The good news is that God is at work to set things right in the world. God made us, loves us, wants to save us, forgive us, give us new life and joy and hope.

But, unfortunately, Zechariah showed that he was not the person to leave the treasure with. For you remember that when an angel told him that his prayer would be answered,

that his wife would bear a son, John the Baptist, who would prepare the way for the messiah, he simply could not believe it! So, this holy man who was so familiar with the holy could not recognize the holy when it was in front of his face. He said, "I need proof. I can't believe this. I am old man and my wife is an old woman..." And so there is the sad scene where Zechariah is rendered speechless by the angel because he did not believe.

## Too Familiar With The Holy

Zechariah's problem is sometimes a problem for many of us in the church. We are so familiar with the holy that we become numb to what is holy, to God's presence and treasure around us.

There is an old story about the great theologian Paul Tillich. A seminary student approached him after he lectured on the authority of Scripture. The student was clutching a huge black Bible. The student asked, "Do you believe this is the Word of God?" Tillich looked down at the student's finger clutching the Bible and said, "Not if you think you can grasp it. Only when the Bible grasps you!" Sometimes we can be so familiar with the holy that we miss it when it seeks to grasp us.

Annie Dillard, the great novelist, writes about this. She comments that too many Christians go to church like children who think they are playing with a chemistry set, when they are really mixing up a batch of dynamite. She says:

"It is madness to wear hats to worship; we should be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews."

## Where Did God Leave The Treasure?

So, God did not leave the treasure with the Herods; they would corrupt it. He did not leave it with the Zechariahs; they could not believe it. God did not leave the treasure in the courthouse or the sanctuary. So, where did he leave it? Luke tells us where in our scripture reading for today. God left the treasure in the most unlikely place—in the womb of a young girl. Now why would

God do that? It is absurd. Why would God choose a young peasant teenage girl to carry his treasure? Why would God choose a young peasant teenage girl to carry the salvation of the world?

The reason is simple, really. Mary was listening. God called out to her and she was listening. Perhaps she had not been jaded by the world. She still had ears to hear. You know, God is always communicating with us. Most of us choose not to listen. God is speaking to us all the time through circumstances, people and convictions, but most of God's messages go unheard and unseen. But not Mary. She was listening.

Mary was not only listening, but she was willing to believe the impossible! Now, be honest. If some 16 year old girl came up to you and told you what Mary had experienced, would you believe her? Could you imagine the ridicule she went through? But Gabriel said, "Nothing is impossible with God!" So, she said, "Let it be, according to your word." What faith Mary had! Oh, if we could only have that kind of faith. You see our lives and our relationship with God goes as far as what we are willing to believe God can do through us. If our lives are limited it is because our faith is limited. Mary chose not to see limitations—her age, her station in life, her socio-economic background. Instead, she chose to see what God wanted to do through her and had the courage to believe it. And because of her faith, the world was changed by God's treasure! Think of it: our salvation hinged on the faith of a young peasant girl!

And, what of this treasure? What is even more absurd than the vessel of God's treasure is the actual treasure. A baby? A baby? Why a baby? Well, Frederick Buechner reminds us that "Once we see God being born of a young peasant girl, we can never be sure where God will show up. We can never be sure what lengths God will go to pursue each of us until we receive his love. I mean, think about it, if God Almighty can be born in a stable it means that God can be among us anywhere. And that there is no place we can hide from God." You see, God is deeply and madly in love with each of us and God will go to the

most absurd lengths to get our attention.

Richard Selzer is a surgeon at Yale Medical Center. He wrote a book entitled, "Mortal Lessons." In that book he tells about being at the bedside of a woman he had just operated on. Part of her mouth was twisted and paralyzed because in removing a tumor from her cheek he was forced to cut a tiny facial nerve. He was at her bedside to check on her and to break the news that she will have a twisted mouth for the rest of her life.

He is standing there, with the patient's husband at the opposite side of the bed, asking, "Who are these people? Who is he and this paralyzed twisted mouth that I have made?" He says, "Then I watched as the two gazed at one another and gently caressed one another. Then the young woman asked, 'Will my mouth always be like this?' I said, 'Yes. The nerve was cut. I am sorry, but I had to cut it getting the tumor out.'" She nodded in understanding silence. Then her husband said, "I like it. It's kind of cute."

Selzer says, "All of a sudden I know who he is. I know who he really is. He is a revelation of God. He is a gift from God. He bends to kiss her twisted mouth. And I am so close that I can see how he twists his own lips to accommodate hers to show her that, no matter what, their kiss will always work."

At Christmas, God has twists his divine presence in Christ to kiss our needy souls. And what God wants more than anything is for you, in prayer, to kiss him back and say, "I love you, too."

God is not an idea, not a concept, not the man upstairs, not someone who listens to you when you get his attention or pray the right prayers. God is the source of your life who is in love with you and wants a relationship with you. God has a plan for your life and wants you to believe all the great things he can do with your life. And he did not send a delegation to manipulate you to believe this truth. He did not send an army to force you to believe it. God sent Himself to show how much He loves you. This is the hope of Christmas. But it is only hope if you receive it. Amen.