

# *This Week at the Creek*

is an e-mail ministry of

## **the Church at Dyers Creek**

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**Here's the text from the pastor's Sunday message:**

### **Listen**

Mark 9:2-7

December 24, 2006

"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him." "Christ, by highest heaven adored; Christ, the everlasting Lord!" From heaven to earth He comes. And His transfiguration on Mount Tabor again reveals His divine nature — just as being born of a virgin had done. "Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth." Just as heavenly visitors announced His birth in Bethlehem, so Jesus received visitors from heaven — legendary saints of old — while with His disciples on earth. And yet God's voice exalts Jesus above Moses and Elijah — above the law and the prophets — and their appearance together shows Jesus as the long-awaited fulfillment of the ancient biblical promise.

Ever since, Jesus has been the dominant figure in the history of Western culture. Yes, each age has made Him relevant to its own needs. He has furnished each new age with answers to fundamental questions as each new generation has had to address new social problems that tested the philosophy of human existence. The world had to take note of Jesus as a rabbi, as the cosmic Christ, as the Ruler of the world, as the King of kings, as the Prince of peace, as the Son of man, as the true Image of man, as the great Liberator. In so many ways Jesus has furnished the answers and the images that has affected society in untold positive ways.

But Jesus did not and does not belong to the churches and the theologians alone; He belongs also to the whole world. None of this is to say that we can make Jesus what we want Him to be; it's quite the opposite actually. It is simply to say that Jesus Christ is adequate for all our needs and that He transcends every culture in such a way that He is able to belong to each age and to address the issues of all time.

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"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him." The Christmas story begins in darkness. There was the darkness of oppression, for God's people were a conquered people. They were a beaten and a defeated people. There was the darkness of persecution. Indeed, it was a despised universal taxation that brought the participants in the story together on that fateful night. There was the

darkness of disillusionment. There was an ever-increasing number who felt that violence and insurrection, not faith, was the most effective path. Yes, on that first Christmas, the mood was one of despair and resignation.

Thus it was then, and thus it is now. We too live in a world of darkness. There are wars and rumors of wars, hunger and unemployment, racism, loneliness, and a sense of emptiness. Perhaps the poet Robert Frost worded it best when he wrote: "I have been acquainted with the night. I have walked in the rain and out of the rain. I have been acquainted with the night." I don't have to tell any of you about the darkness, because in one form or another – at one time or another – it has touched the life of every person here. You have been acquainted with the night. Thus we have not gathered here this Christmas Eve to naively deny the existence of the darkness. Nowhere in scripture do we receive a pep talk or, what's more, an argument that things aren't really as bad as they seem. Rather, the Bible affirms that the darkness is real – that the darkness is present.

But, it also affirms that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. The prophet Isaiah foretold, "Those who walk in darkness have seen a great light." The apostle John records that "the light shines through the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it." And that is why we can sing: "Son of God, love's pure light radiant beams from Thy holy face with the dawn of redeeming grace."

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"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him." And here is a contemporary message from Him to His children: It has come to My attention that many of you are upset that folks are taking My name out of the season. Maybe you've forgotten that I wasn't actually born during this time of the year and that it was some of your predecessors who decided to celebrate My birthday on what was actually a pagan festival. But that's OK; I do appreciate being remembered anytime. How I really feel about this celebration can probably be most easily understood by those of you who have been blessed with children of your own. You see, I don't care what you call the day. If you want to celebrate My birth, just get along with and love one another.

Having said that much, let Me go on. If it bothers you that your town doesn't allow a scene depicting My birth, then move out one of those over-inflated Santas or snowmen and put a small Nativity scene on your front lawn. Oh, and stop worrying about the fact that people are calling it a holiday tree instead of a Christmas tree. I made all the trees! I'd like it if you'd remember Me anytime you see any tree.

If you want to give Me a present in remembrance of My birth, here's my wish list; choose something from it. Instead of writing protest letters objecting to the way My birthday is being celebrated, write letters of love and hope to soldiers away from home. They're terribly afraid and lonely this time of year. I know; they tell Me all the time. Or visit someone in a nursing home. You don't have to know them personally; they just need to know that someone cares about them. And instead of giving your children a lot of gifts you can't afford and they don't need, spend time with them. Tell them the story of My birth and why I came to live with you down here. Hold them in your arms, and remind them that

I love them. Here's one I'd really like: Pick someone who has hurt you in the past and forgive him or her.

Did you know that several people right there in Middle Tennessee will attempt to take their own life this season because they feel so alone and hopeless? Since you don't know who they are, try giving everyone you meet a warm smile; it could make a difference. And instead of nitpicking about what your department store calls the holiday, just be patient with the people who work there. Give them a warm smile and a kind word. In fact, if you really want to make a difference, start thinking of yourself as a missionary, taking My love and good news to those who don't know me. And if you really want to make a statement about your faith in Me, please behave like a Christian. Don't do things in secret that you wouldn't do in My presence. Let people know by your very actions that you are one of Mine.

One last thing – and don't forget this: I am the Lord, and I can take care of Myself. You just love Me and do what I've told you to do; I'll take care of all the rest. So get right to work on what I've told you in My Word; the time is short. I'll help you, of course, but the ball is now in your court. I love you, and I'll be with you.

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"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him." I wonder what I would have heard had I been there that night. It's a question that annually haunts me. Would I have heard the choirs of angels singing or simply the sounds of barnyard animals shifting around? Would I have seen the star in the sky that night or simply two poor and very frightened kids? Would I have understood the hushed silence of the divine presence or simply the chill of a cold east wind? Would I have understood the message of Emmanuel – that our God is with us – or would the cosmic implications of that evening have passed me by? I am convinced that had two people been there that night in Bethlehem, it is quite possible that they could have heard and seen two entirely different scenes. I believe this because all of life is that way. God never presents Himself to us in a manner in which we are forced to believe. We're always left with an option – for that is God's way. And that is why one person can say, "It's a miracle!" while another says, "It's a coincidence."

Certainly very few people in Palestine saw and heard and understood what took place that night. Choirs of angels were singing, but they were drowned out by the haggling and trading going on in the Jerusalem bazaar. There was a bright star in the sky, but the only ones apparently to pay any attention to it were pagan astrologers from the East. If anyone did see Mary and Joseph on that most fateful night, they were too preoccupied with their own problems to offer any assistance.

You see, what we see and what we hear in life depends not upon the events going on around us but rather on who we are as people. It's not what is out there but what is in here – right here inside of us. Does what is inside of you help you to believe that all is well – or at least will be when God fulfills the time? Does what is inside of you enable you to truly behold the King of angels? Does what is inside of you cause you to be joyful and triumphant? Does what is inside of you spur you to sing in exultation? Does what is inside of you allow Christ to

be born in you?

Let us pray: Truly transform us, Lord, changing us from the inside out. Then may we take Your love and good news to those who don't know You. Help us to behave as a Christian should. Indeed, this Christmas, may we mend a quarrel and seek out a forgotten friend and dismiss suspicion –replacing it with trust. This Christmas and throughout the year, may we write a love letter and share some treasure and give a soft answer and encourage the despairing. This Christmas and throughout the year, may we find the time and forgo a grudge and forgive an enemy and apologize when we're wrong. This Christmas and throughout the year, may we think first of someone else and appreciate and be kind and gentle and laugh a little more. This Christmas and throughout the year, may we take up arms against malice and decry complacency and express our gratitude and welcome a stranger and gladden the heart of a child and take pleasure in the beauty and wonder of Your creation. This Christmas, may we listen. And throughout our lives, may we manifest our loyalty to You in both word and in deed. In the name of Jesus, we pray.

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