

Christmas Feelings
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.
December 17, 2023

Text: Isaiah 9:1-7, Matthew 2:1-11

Purpose: This season of the year brings up many emotions. We feel the ***rush*** of the season, the ***crush*** of loved ones absent, the ***mush*** of Christmas traditions supplanting the first Christmas story, the ***lush*** of alcohol consumption, and the ***blush*** of over indulgence and ignoring the plight of others less fortunate. We need to focus on the ***hush*** of Christmas. The one who came to earth in such a humble manner to redeem us from our sin. Let us remember the reason for the season is Jesus Christ – Immanuel “God with us.”

I came across a story this past week that I wanted to share with you today. It has nothing to do with Christmas, but it does fit the season – the hunting season.

Three friends decided to go deer hunting together. One was a lawyer, one a doctor, and the other a preacher.



As they were walking, along came a big buck. The three saw him, pulled up their guns and shot simultaneously. Immediately the buck dropped to the ground and all three rushed up to see how big it actually was.

Upon reaching it they found out that it was dead but had only one bullet hole. Thus, a debate followed concerning whose buck it was.

A few minutes later a game officer came by and asked what the problem was. The doctor told him their reason for the debate. The officer told them he would take a look and tell them who shot it.

Within a few seconds the game officer said with much confidence, "The pastor shot the buck!"

They all wondered how he knew that so quickly.

The officer said, "Easy. The bullet went in one ear and out the other."

That is exactly how I feel sometimes after a Sunday morning service. Everything I have said has gone in one ear and out the another. Hopefully you will hear something this morning that will stick between your ears.

Natalie Sleeth wrote a song years ago that describes for us some of the Christmas feelings – or emotions – we have this time of year. The words say:

Christmas is a feeling filling the air,
It's love and joy and laughter of people
everywhere.

Christmas is a feeling bringing good cheer;
It reaches out to touch you when the holidays draw near.

It's mistletoe and falling snow, and candles burning bright.
It's a baby in a manger on a cold winter night;
It's glad noels and chiming bells,
And presents by the tree;
It's the spirit of giving in you and in me.



For Christmas is a feeling filling the air,
It's love and joy and laughter of people everywhere.
But if Christmas is a feeling
Bringing such good cheer,
Then why, O why don't you and I
Try to make it last all year?
Why can't it last all year?

Not all of us feel this way about Christmas. We may come to the time of Christmas with a variety of feelings. We may dread Christmas or we may welcome it. We may be glad when it's all over or we may hate to see it pass. We may be like Scrooge, and say, "Bah! Humbug!" Or we may think of Christmas as the very best time of the year.



Let me suggest several words, which may sound similar, but greatly differ in meaning and express the feelings some people have about Christmas. I first heard this list of words from Ray Hodge, the former pastor of First Baptist Church here in Kinston and want to share them with you today.

I. THE *RUSH* OF CHRISTMAS¹



I am not sure if you are aware of this, but in today's technology world, there has been the emergence of what are called emoji. They are usually yellow faced images that display a wide range of emotions. If you have a cell phone you may have sent a "thumbs up" or "smiley face" emoji. If you still have a flip phone, this may be new information to you today.

The first word – or emoji – that comes to mind this Christmas, is the word **RUSH**. As you can see from this emoji, we have this guy running in a frantic rush. Today there is a rush associated with getting ready for Christmas. That was not the case with the first Christmas, because that first one did not come in a rush. It had been a long time in coming for those who had heard the messianic prophecies over the many centuries. It had been a long wait for those who wondered about the truth and the time of those prophecies. And it involved a laborious and extended journey for Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem by express donkey, a distance of about ninety-five miles. It was a journey which included danger, fatigue, inconvenience, discomfort, and pain.



Our Christmases, however, are times of being busy and rushing around.

- There is the shopping for presents, clothing, and food.
- Much attention is given to the sending of Christmas cards.
- Considerable time and expense are given to gift wrapping.
- Hours may be given to the search for a Christmas tree and in decorating the tree, the house, and the yard.
- There may be special sewing for a dress to wear or to give and work on handcrafts intended as gifts.
- There is usually the picking out of nuts, preparation of fruits, baking of cakes and cookies, and the cooking of food.
- Members of the family are involved in several parties and suppers.



- A lot of hours are spent in preparing for church Christmas programs, music practices, and performances.
- There may be several visits to shut-ins and friends.
- There often is the travel near and far, as "...to grandmother's house we go," and to many other houses.

To adults it seems such a rush, and it comes all too quickly year after year. To children the coming of Christmas seems too slow and its going is too fast. The rush of doing all of these things may obscure for many of us the true significance of Christmas. We may just be worn out from all of it and say, "I'll be glad when it's over."



Several years ago, *The Saturday Evening Post* carried the following story: "Last night John Elzy, watchman at the Grand Eagle Department Store, while making his rounds of the bargain basement, found the body of a man lying under the counter. He was thin to the point of emaciation, apparently in his mid-thirties, and shabbily dressed. His pockets were empty and there was no mark of identification upon his person. Store officials believe that he was trampled in the Christmas rush and crawled under the counter for shelter. But they were unable to account for what appeared to be nail wounds in his hands. The police are investigating."



The moral of the story would indicate, Jesus is trampled amid all of our RUSHING around!

II. THE *CRUSH* OF CHRISTMAS

A second word – or emoji – that comes to mind related to Christmas is **CRUSH**. This crying emoji typifies how some are coping with this season of the year. Christmas is not always a happy time. There is an aspect to Christmas which is not a happy one at all. It may be sad, and even crushing to us. In fact, for some it can be the saddest time of the year. Perhaps more than at of any other time we associate Christmas with family togetherness and remember some persons not present who were customarily there. We sometimes sing, "I'll be home for Christmas," which expresses this feeling. This makes Christmas especially difficult for many of us because some people we always saw at Christmas cannot be seen anymore.



When families gather this year, someone may say this could be their last Christmas together. We never know. As you think of your family and friends, this Christmas could be the last one for them as well. Cherish the time you have.

All of us have **CRUSHING** moments during the Christmas season. I want to encourage you to focus on what you have, instead of what you don't have this year.

III. THE *MUSH* OF CHRISTMAS

A third word I think about during Christmas is the word **MUSH**. These emoji remind us of how muddled Christmas can be. The simple Christmas story started it all. And nothing can add to its basic truths. It is a story of a baby born



in Bethlehem. His birth proclaimed by angels, retold by shepherds, and gifts coming from wise men from the East.

Yet so much has been added to the celebration of Christmas. Some of it adds beauty and meaning. Some of it is merely entertainment and fantasy. We have **MUSHED** so much that is not a part of the Christmas story.

Included is the perpetuation of the Santa Claus tradition with its extensive legend. Maybe you have heard of the little boy who visited a department store to visit Santa, who asked him what he wanted for Christmas.



The boy said, "Gee, didn't you get my letter?"

We sing about "Rudolph" the red-nosed reindeer, and we know the names of some others pulling Santa's sleigh.



We hear about the Grinch who nearly stole Christmas, and characters like the Drummer boy, Charlie Brown, Tiny Tim, and Scrooge.

And there are a hundred other stories which add to the pleasure of Christmas for us. Many of these were fabricated to sell books, songs, records, television time, and other products. But the bottom line of it all is described in the word "mush," if legend and sentimentality are allowed to take over for the true meaning of Christmas. Mush or sentimentality is when people can adore the babe in a manger, but cannot accept the Savior of the cross. It is mushy sentimentality when the true meaning of the Christ event is glossed over and missed.



Most everyone can warm up to a baby's smile. People are emotionally attracted to Jesus as a babe. But Jesus is not a babe anymore, and we cannot spend the rest of our lives merely adoring him as a babe. Jesus grew up, lived, and died as our Savior, and some of those who adored him as a babe helped to kill him when he was a man.

There are many people who will set up little manger scenes and give lip service to the child of Christmas, but who by their lifestyles show that they are the enemies of Christ. We cannot truly observe Christmas until we look from Bethlehem to Calvary, from the cradle to the cross.

IV. THE *LUSH* OF CHRISTMAS

A fourth word found at Christmas is the word **LUSH**. I think this emoji says it all. This word is associated with the excessive use of alcohol. It is unfortunate that so many people use the beautiful time of Christmas as an opportunity for indulging excessively in alcohol. Many people, who never drink at other times, may do so at Christmas. And many people who drink only rarely and moderately may use Christmas as a time for excessive drinking. Some employers even give employees gifts of alcohol as Christmas presents.

A television commercial a few years ago, use to say, "Holidays are made for Michelob." We as a nation are rapidly moving away from the season of Christmas as a celebration of Christ's advent, to a time of personal holiday. We hear



of so many trying to push the word "Christmas" out with the phrase "Happy Holidays."

Yet for many people today, Christmas is a time of alcohol consumption. What a distortion of what this holiday is about. Sadly, many families will be impacted this year because of drunk drivers killing ones we love. The **LUSH** of Christmas emphasizes the *liquid spirits* at Christmas instead of the *Spirit* of Christmas.

V. THE *BLUSH* OF CHRISTMAS

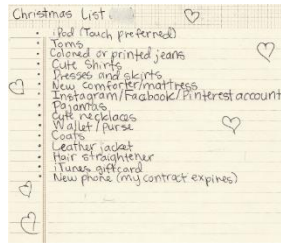
A fifth word I think about at Christmas is the word **BLUSH**. We get so caught up in the consumerism and greed of Christmas that it should cause us to blush. Someone once said, "Humans are the only animals which blush or have any need to blush." You and I might blush if we think about the way things really are at Christmas.

A. WHEN WE REALIZE HOW WE OBSERVE IT.

Our observance of Christmas might cause us to blush if we really think about it. For the most part, we overdo it in seeking and providing creature comforts for ourselves and for others. Somehow, we justify the buying of luxury items for ourselves at Christmas. We may say, "I owe it to myself," "I deserve it," or it's time I did something for myself."



We may lavish a good time on ourselves, our children, and our family. The way we go about Christmas, you would think it was OUR birthday instead of a time of celebrating God's generosity to us and to give our gifts to Him and to others in Jesus' name.



We often make such a long list for ourselves and our wants that we forget what Christmas is all about!



An anonymous poet wrote:

I had the nicest Christmas list, the longest one in town,
Till daddy looked at it and said, you'll have to cut it down.

I knew that what he said was true, beyond the faintest doubt,
But was amazed to hear him say, you've left your best friend out.

And so, I scanned my list again, and said, Oh, that's not true!
But daddy said, His name's not there, that friend who died for you.

And then I clearly understood, T'was Jesus that he meant;
For Him who should come first of all, I hadn't planned a cent.

I'd made a Christmas birthday list, and left the Savior out!
But, oh, it didn't take me long, to change the list about.

And though I've had to drop some names, of folks I like a lot
My Lord must have the most... Because...His name is at the top.

B. IF OUR CONDUCT HIDES CHRIST FROM THE WORLD.

Our observance of Christmas might cause us to **BLUSH**, if we knew that our behavior stood in the way of someone's coming to Christ. You remember the story about how Jesus came into Jericho, Zacchaeus had to climb a tree to be able to see Jesus, since he could not see Him over and through the crowd. Just as the crowds stood in the way of Zacchaeus seeing Jesus, our actions, words, activities, business, anger, frustration, pettiness, can cause others to not see or hear Jesus.

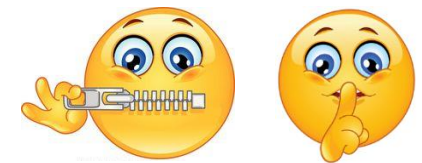


Another poet spoke along these same lines:

I cannot see the Christ child for the soldiers marching past.
I cannot hear the Christ child for the bugles' loud blast.
I cannot see the Christ child for smoke is in my eyes.
I cannot hear the shepherd for children's hungry cries.

Our excesses lavished upon ourselves and our blind eye towards the needs around us should cause us to **BLUSH** in shame. What God wants most from you this Christmas is to see and hear the Christ Child, Jesus!

VI. THE *HUSH* OF CHRISTMAS.



A sixth word I think of when I consider Christmas is the word **HUSH**. These emoji reminds us we need to “zip our lips” and “be quiet.” The mystery of Christmas should give us a feeling of awe and amazement, and we should pause and reflect in its hush of silence.

We sing the Christmas songs this season:

"Silent night, Holy night. All is calm, all is bright."

*"O little town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep The silent stars go by....*

"How silently, how silently The wondrous gift is given."

There was a silence, a hush of heaven's plan unfolding, a silence broken only by the sounds of angels singing, and a baby's cry. The wonder of it all produces a hush.

1. "A CHILD IS BORN"--

This is God's unique way to save us and his world. John Fort Newton said, "Only God could have thought of Christmas."

2. "A SON IS GIVEN"--

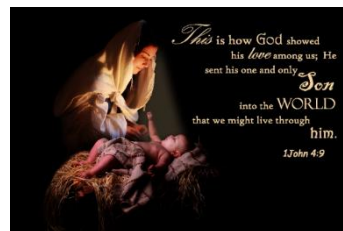
This is God's gift to humanity. It is the true gift of Christmas.

3. "THE GOVERNMENT SHALL BE UPON HIS SHOULDER"--

The hope of each life and every nation is to be found in submitting to this Christ as King. Until then, there will be no hope and no peace.

William Harold Niedlinger wrote the hymn, "The Birthday of a King." Its lines go like this:

In the little village of Bethlehem,
there lay a child one day,
And the sky was bright with a holy
light, O'er the place where Jesus lay.



'Twas a humble birthplace,
But O how much God gave to us that day,
From the manger bed, what a path has led;
What a perfect holy way;

Alleluia! O how the angels sang,
Alleluia! How it rang;
And the sky was bright with a holy light,
'Twas the birthday of a King.

This Christmas let us examine our emotions. When the times of **RUSH, CRUSH, MUSH, LUSH, BLUSH** of Christmas overwhelm us, let us turn to the **HUSH** of Christmas and know the reason for the season – Jesus – Immanuel – God with us.



Let us be open to receive the Christ child this Christmas season.

*"Where meek souls will receive Him still,
the dear Christ enters in."*

LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹ Sermon outline from Ray K. Hodge, former pastor of First Baptist Church, Kinston NC

