

**THE MESSAGE for Advent 1****November 28, 2010****Isaiah 2:1-5*****Peace*****The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller**

We are less than a month away from Christmas. A month away from the day we celebrate Jesus' birth. His birthday party is of biblical proportions – taking us at least four weeks to get ready – spiritually. And it's an awesome celebration in just about every country, in just about every language, and in just about every way imaginable. On or around December 25<sup>th</sup> millions of people will pause to ponder the importance of Jesus' birth. And there will be gifts galore – of every size, shape, and purpose – purchased, hidden under beds, in closets, and attics. It is a season of gift giving. I can hardly wait...

Those gifts will be wrapped, and given, and received, and opened, and play with, and broken, and tried on, and returned, and... well... you get the idea. We say that somehow all this gift-giving hoopla is connected to honoring the greatest gift ever given: Jesus, the Savior of the world, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, and the Prince of peace.

Ponder with me for a moment. What if, some alien from another planet somewhere in the cosmos landed here on earth and asked us – *why do we do what we do at Christmas time?* We would probably say something like, “Well, it's what we've always done. This is what we do.” And we would be right. Then our out of this world visitor would kindly ask, “But, why?”

We'll get back to our visitor's question in a moment. Consider this humorous story:

A newlywed couple is spending their first Christmas together. She is preparing a ham dinner. She cuts off both ends of the ham and throws them away before she puts the ham into the oven. Her ever observant husband asks, “Why did you do that?”

She responds, “I don't know. My mother always did that.”

After she puts the ham in the oven she calls her mother and asks, “Mom, why do you always cut the ends off the Christmas ham before you put it in the oven?”

Her mother says, “I don't know. It's something I always did because your grandmother used to always do that. I'll ask her.”

So mother calls grandmother and asks. “Mother, at Christmas time, why did you always cut off both ends of the ham and throw them away before you put the ham into the oven?”

Grandmother responded, “Well, since our family was so big I would get the biggest ham I could find to feed all of us. I would cut off both ends of the ham so it would fit into the pan.”

Back to our visitor’s question, *why do we do what we do at Christmas time?*

Now please allow me to clarify something. I am not trying to take the fun out of Christmas. I love getting and giving gifts. Who doesn’t? I’m simply asking you to join me in taking a moment this year to ponder our motives. Why do we do what we do when it comes to gift-giving? Why is it so important to find the right gift for the right person?

I pondered that question this week. There is nothing I need or want for Christmas – really. I look in my closet and I have more than enough clothes. I have clothes in my closet that I don’t even wear. I look in the garage and I have more than enough toys to play with and I have more than enough tools to fix those toys. And I have neighbors who have tools if I need to borrow them. I look in and around our house and we have more than enough stuff.

I am truly blessed. I am not for want or need when it comes to material things. Amber and I have this conversation often. We are truly blessed and God continues to bless us in many and various ways.

So when Amber asked me what I would like for Christmas this year I didn’t say “nothing.” That’s what she might get for Christmas. I said, “Let me think about it.”

What do you get for the person who has everything they need? I went to the computer to get some ideas. I Googled that question and I got 133 million hits. 133 million web pages offering suggestions about possible gifts for the person who has everything. There are a lot of odd and strange and bizarre gifts out there.

One webpage caught my eye... [www.bimbambanana.com](http://www.bimbambanana.com). It offers a list of Gadgets, Gizmos, Crazy Innovations, and Funny Gifts for the person who has everything.

For example: there is the puzzle alarm clock that is guaranteed to wake you up in the morning by firing four puzzle pieces into the air. Your job is to put them back into the alarm clock in the right order to turn the thing off.

There is the hamburger phone – you flip the bun open to listen through the top bun and then speak into the beef patty, cheese, lettuce, tomato, pickle, and onions on the bottom bun.

There is roll of black color toilet paper instead of the plain old boring white. Colored toilet paper can add a little elegance to the bathroom, so the webpage claims.

There is a security safe that looks exactly like a head of lettuce, no thief would ever think to look for your valuables in a head of lettuce.

There's a glow in the dark golf ball so you can play golf after dusk. It has a flashing LED light in it and blinks on and off for five minutes after you hit it. It comes with 40 hours of playing time.

There is the toaster printer, it looks like a computer printer, but it really a toaster for toasting your bread.

There are all kinds of odd and strange and bizarre gifts that you can get for Christmas, and why not? When we think about Christmas and how all of this gift-giving started in the first place, it's a strange season indeed.

The birth of Jesus: the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Prince of peace came as a baby. Born in a manger – a dirty, dark, damp manger – how odd? His first bed was a feeding trough for the animals – how strange? Before the age of two he was seen as a threat to the known world – how bizarre? God became a living gift to the entire world – how odd? The invisible became visible – how strange? The Almighty came and walked and talked with mere mortals – how bizarre? Heaven and earth have come together in one package.

This *is* a time for gift-giving where differences come together bringing peace and wholeness and harmony. Check out this really cute video. It says it all.  
[http://www.sermoncentral.com/articleb.asp?article=Christmas-Sermons-Illustrations-Videos-PowerPoints&utm\\_source=SermonCentral\\_Newsletter&utm\\_medium=SC-newsletter-links&utm\\_campaign=SC-Newsletter](http://www.sermoncentral.com/articleb.asp?article=Christmas-Sermons-Illustrations-Videos-PowerPoints&utm_source=SermonCentral_Newsletter&utm_medium=SC-newsletter-links&utm_campaign=SC-Newsletter)

God showed up and God continues to show up in many and various ways. That's what the prophet Isaiah proclaimed for 40 years around 700 B.C. Isaiah's name literally means "the Lord saves!" So when people would see Isaiah, they knew what he stood for and what his message would be. He was like a walking PowerPoint presentation. He was a living commercial for God's living message.

Question: When people see you do they know what you stand for? Do they know what your message will be?

Isaiah's life and message was this – *God desires all people to live in peace with God and in peace with one another.* Listen to our reading from Isaiah 2:1-5... (*read text*)

A vision of peace. According to Isaiah that peace begins with worship where we experience God's transforming presence among us. Then, with God's peace and transforming presence in our lives, we are transformed and sent to be living gifts of God's peace in the world.

When nations, when people fail to live in peace, or pursue God's peace, then God's judgment does its humbling and purifying work in our lives. When we try to live

outside of God's peace on earth as it is in heaven, it's like trying to live without oxygen. Why would anyone want to do that?

We live in a world that's becoming more and more polarized, secularized, and individualized; Isaiah's vision is worth considering. It's a vision where everyone is welcomed into God's abiding presence, where everyone is invited to learn God's wisdom and instructions for living in peace, where everyone in the world is welcome to experience God's gift of peace in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The apostle Paul says that's a vision of the church. A place, a community of faith where everyone is welcomed into God's presence. A place, a community of faith to learn God's wisdom and instructions for living in peace. Where weapons of war are turned into gardening tools. Where male or female, Jew or Gentile, slave or free, high church or low church, emerging church or traditional church, contemporary church or no church, pierced or tattooed, long hair or bad hair, jeans & T-shirt or suit & tie – none of that matters. None of that matters.

What matters is a life-giving relationship with Jesus as Lord, a relationship with the ultimate peacemaker who did so from the cross. He, our Lord Jesus, calls us to be peacemakers, his peacemakers.

But here's the thing we can't give what we don't have. So if you are here today without peace. If there is something troubling you, if you are not at peace because of something going on in your life, I pray that God's peace be yours today before you leave worship. Leave your troubles here at the foot of the cross. Give them up to the Lord.

I pray that God will give you the strength to make whatever changes you need to make in your life so that you will leave this place to be the peacemaker Christ Jesus is calling you and equipping you to be.

My prayer is that over the next four weeks God will transform each one of us into faithful agent of peace in our homes, at work or school, among our family and friends.

I pray that God will give us a colorful imagination for our ministry here at Friedens (Peace) Lutheran Church as we wrap up 2010 and move into 2011.

I pray that over the next month you will focus your attention not on getting another gadget or a gift that you don't really need but focus your attention on how we can be living gifts of peace to the people around us. Now that's a gift that anyone and everyone can use this year, a living gift of peace. Amen.

Let us pray... Amen.