

CHRISTMAS EVE '20 B – CHRISTMAS IS MORE THAN...A BABY

We are a week away from the 3rd decade of the 21st century. No sooner were we told we weren't going to live through Y2K w/ the electrical grid intact, than here we are on the brink of the 21st century turning 21. And just think about that a minute...

Is there A WORD you would use to describe the 21st century so far? See if you can get above the weeds of the last 12 months for a bird's-eye view & what ONE WORD for you sums up your appraisal of the 21st century so far?

Any ideas... I did some digging... & here's how some commentators around the world have answered that... 21st century is marked by unprecedented... PROSPERITY... there are more millionaires & billionaires than ever... fewer people actually live in poverty around the world. Poverty still exists but more & more people have access to the means of survival above bare minimum subsistence... gov't intervention, global action, private enterprise Prosperity... more people have access to more than ever ^{b/4}.

LONGEVITY – more people are living longer... Medical tech & interventions help us live longer despite the growing range of long term health issues many of us in the western world face... the US's operation warpspeed brought a SARS-Covid-2 vaccine to the world in less than a year... never ^{b/4} have we seen a vaccine in less than 4 yrs that was Mumps in 1967... we are living longer... My mom outlived an actuarial table

GLOBAL – we are connected to linked w/ interacting w/ people from all over the world nearly every day via technology & immigration & business & travel more than ever...

TECHNOLOGY – we have more computing power in our phones than landed the 1st men on the moon. We have landed spacecraft on moving interstellar objects & brought back stuff from there... probed the farthest reaches of the universe & explored the bottom of the ocean & found a plastic bag in the Marianas Trench

Speaking of technology... You may or may not be familiar w/ the YouVersion Bible app downloaded >600 million in nearly every country on the planet ^{1/12} people >2000 versions of the Bible in ~1400 languages. For the last 5 years the most searched, bookmarked, shared passages of the Bible have focused on... Any guesses? Fear... fear...

BibleGateway (gold-std Scripture search, study access website) reports similar findings... most searched, bookmarked, downloaded, shared passages are those in the Bible addressing Fear Uncertainty Doubt. Whatever else we *MIGHT* say about the 21st century... there remains a hunger for certainty... a quest for meaning & purpose... a path through the anxieties & insecurities & fears that seem to fill our days & take away from our sense of contentment/wholeness/joy/satisfaction.

I understand that... In my 58 years of living I can still see those moments when fear was all up on me like a bad rash... times when my life was in danger or when those I care about were under threat... when stuff in my life made no sense & put all I hold dear in jeopardy... situations where I saw no good outcome pain loss grief at every turn... confronted by a decision & I had no good input wisdom from which to decide. I know I'm not alone in that... search engines & the looks on your faces tell me so. We have access to more information than ever in human history but great swathes of it is contradictory & we have to sort fake from true. At the same time we live in an era where we're told truth is relative or subjective or yours vs mine vs theirs... we should to trust the science about this but ignore it about that...

Which is why I. Love. Christmas. *"Don't be afraid!" the angel said. "I bring you good news of great joy for everyone! The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born tonight in Bethlehem, the city of David! You will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."* Tonight... there is no uncertainty. Tonight there's an antidote to fear. Tonight God gives us a rock-solid foundational truth on which we can stake our lives & know it comes good... holds fast... never fails. So much of what the world sees in & celebrates of Christmas is sweet & sentimental nostalgic & safe... So much of what the world sees in & celebrates of Christmas is tame bland Hollywood harmonies of big smiles & laden tables & over-flowing piles of goodies under the tree... So much of what the world sees in & celebrates of Christmas is a baby... harmless & happy... cuddly & kind... But *good news of great joy for everyone! The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord...* is more than a baby. C-mas is where the life of God takes hold of your life/mine & this world is forever transformed. C-mas is that moment that God looks deep into our hearts & knows how dark & difficult our days sometimes are, how confused we get about our identity & our place in life - about what matters most in the world & how many painful things we do to each other out of that confusion & insecurity... FUD. God knows how distant we are from what he created us to be & how we regularly distance ourselves from him & his purposes for us.

God knows our fear uncertainty & doubt... our self-will & self-centeredness & does something about it. But when God engages in our lives, he doesn't come to punish, or frighten, or scold, or threaten... God comes to show us that we are loved deeply, known fully, treasured truly & embraced forever. God looks through the corridors of time & sees you as one in whom he delights. He sees you as one on whom he will

pour out his love/forgiveness – his grace/mercy/peace – joy/hope...his restoration & reconciliation...to make you his beloved child.

And just to make sure there was no misunderstanding God delivers his fullness embodied in the flesh of his Son Jesus...The shepherds were told they would recognize him because he looks just like every other baby ever born...he looks just like you...me...He came to share our life...to fully wear our flesh & blood our hopes/dreams our frustrations/disappointments our heartaches/failures our laughter/tears. So that when we look into the manger we see what God intends for us...love – life – joy in perfect relationship – perfect union with God the Father.

C-mas is God's declaration that God is not ashamed of you or hiding from you but desperately seeking you with an anguished passionate love that can only be expressed by sharing this life with you.

C-mas is God's assurance that no one (not you your family your kids) no one is beyond the grasp of his saving redeeming love...that God is relentless in his intention to love you...won't keep his hands off until we are taken close to his heart...embraced in his tender care.

C-mas is the unshakable guarantee that not even death can scatter us so far away that God can't draw us back because in Jesus He's already been to the grave & declared it powerless over us...He's been there & declared it finished... He's been there & blown it open so that even from the farthest corners & darkest reaches of death itself God will retrieve us & bring us safely to himself.

God sent his Son to take into himself the world's darkness & brokenness & hurt...including that darkness & brokenness & hurt in each of us & in place of all that's wrong bring light & life & love & peace & comfort & restoration & joy.

My favourite Bible verse...you get to hear it almost every Christmas...

*God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ,
and through him God reconciled everything to himself.
He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth
by means of Christ's blood on the cross. Colossians 1:19-20*

We know this year has felt like the perfect storm - the convergence of everything bad that makes everything else worse...But tonight God gives you that which is truly perfect. Christmas is perfect...perfect peace of God for all of us...perfect love that drags us from the jaws of death to abundant life & drives out fear...perfect joy no storm can overthrow...perfect life that embraces us in our imperfection brokenness & death so that every moment is not a descent from bad to worse but a journey

toward wholeness & fullness & abundance & healing & strength. The child of the manger is never emptied of his power. He holds more for you than you can ever dream. Whatever the circumstances of your life right now, or whatever you see on the 2021 horizon come and receive more than you can ever imagine this Christmas. More than a baby...more than sweet soft safe tame nostalgia: Christmas is power & hope FOR YOU...FOREVER.

Let's pray with that in mind...

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the birth of your Son. Open our hearts to receive him with joy and thankfulness. Let your grace fill us, your life overwhelm, and your joy heal us.

Move in us by your Spirit so that we do not just commemorate the birth of Jesus, but celebrate his presence and his continued power in our lives.

We not only celebrate his life given for our world, but rejoice at his continued rule over it & care for it. We thank you for that moment in a stable, and for this moment, and for those to come, when the miracle happens again, and your love becomes real in us for the world to see and rejoice...In Jesus' name. Amen.