

The Rev. Joel Petruschke
Our Saviour Lutheran Church
Christmas Day
December 25, 2022

So, again, let me say, “Merry Christmas to you all!”

It is a such blessing to be able to gather together for worship on Christmas Day.

It is nice when Christmas actually falls on a Sunday.

Typically, my family, and I imagine yours too, typically my family would be sitting around the tree right about now, unwrapping presents.

Maybe you did so earlier this morning, or maybe you will do so after you return home from church.

One of those lovely Christmas scenes is that of loved ones gathered around the tree, unwrapping presents, right?

PAUSE

But have you ever stopped and thought about that tradition of unwrapping presents around the tree?

Indeed, have you ever stopped and thought about all of the strange traditions associated with the holidays?

Each year in the holiday season, I stop and pause long enough to think to myself, “Boy, we are a strange species.”

I mean imagine what aliens from another world would think if they observed us during the holidays.

For one of the first things we do in the holidays is set up a tree inside our homes.

Now, trees belong outside.

If Chevy Chase’s movie, *Christmas Vacation* taught us anything, squirrels live in trees and they could get into your house, if you bring a tree indoors.

And the dog could suddenly end up chasing that stowaway squirrel all over the house, upending tables and chairs, turning your house into a shambles.

No, trees, say it with me, belong “outside.”

PAUSE

But while we are on the subject of the Christmas tree.

It is not enough that we bring a tree inside, but then we proceed to decorate it.

First, people thought it would be a good idea to put lights on trees—a tradition apparently started by Martin Luther, mind you.

Yes, Luther must have been dipping a little too much into the egg nog, when he came up with this bright idea, pun intended.

Because remember, at Luther's time, they didn't have strands of electric lights.

No, Luther decided to put of all things candles on his Christmas tree. (Pause) Any one see a problem with this? (RAISE HAND)

Yeah, I am glad you're with me.

And then, and then people decided to put ornaments on their trees.

They decided to put tinsel on their trees, and strands of popcorn on their trees, and really anything else they saw fit.

Today, anything and everything goes on the tree...elementary school art projects made by the kids, popsicle-stick framed pictures, pipe cleaner angels, you name it, anything and everything goes on the tree, right?

Sometimes I think if we just took the utility drawer in our kitchen, you know which drawer I am talking about... that drawer which collects all the things we don't know what to do with otherwise—things that have broken off that you plan to glue back on, old mementoes, rubber bands, and such...

Sometimes I think that if we just turn that drawer over and shook it out above the tree, so as to see what sticks on the tree, we would get the same effect.

And then we top it all off with a pretty star or an angel.

And don't get me started about why there is an angel that sits on top of the Christmas tree.

PAUSE

Yes, we have to admit, that it is all a bit weird, to say the least.

But there's more.

How about the tradition of hanging stockings?

Again, strange, right?

Why would we hang clothing around our house as decoration—clothing, mind you, that normally goes on our feet?

And why, pray tell, would we hang big socks up and then proceed to put food inside?

"Here's your Hershey's chocolate bar. I apologize for the unusual smell."

And then there is the whole idea of going Christmas caroling around to people's homes in subarctic temperatures.

We love this tradition, don't we, until we pause to think about it.

"Knock knock! Hello, do you mind if we sing a couple of songs to you while you hold your door open and let all the cold air into your house? No, please, do keep it open, because you know, we are all less than three minutes away from hypothermia, and catching even a wisp of warm air would be quite nice."

You know, it would make more sense to go Christmas caroling say around September when the weather is still warm, and the days are still relatively long.

PAUSE

And how about kissing under mistletoe?

"Owp, look what I have here? It's a twig I got from a tree. You know what that means?"

I mean, come on. Really? We couldn't up with anything better to spark some romance? Some guy breaks off a twig, and expects a kiss. And do we even know what mistletoe is?

It is actually a parasitic plant, that lives on other trees and shrubs, such that it sucks the nutrients and water from its host.

Mistletoe literally sucks the life out its host plant.

Think of that the next time you see lips coming at you while standing under mistletoe.

Yes, we do some really strange things around the holidays.

And, I am of the opinion that aliens actually have visited our world, and they have spied on us during the holidays, and then they simply left.

Yes, they left.

They thought to themselves, “Hah! There is no use making contact with them. They’d hold a twig over us as a greeting and proceed to suck the life out of us with their parasitic lips. No, thank you.”

And so they left.

And here we are, with all our Christmas traditions, and no contact with alien life. Bummer, right?

PAUSE

But, don’t get me wrong. I am just being facetious. I actually do like most, if not all, of the traditions associated Christmas, especially the kissing part. Right, Kath?

I do like all the traditions even if I have to laugh at how strange it all is.

But, I do think that is the point, after all.

Yes, I do think that Christmas is meant to bring us joy, and love, and faith, and hope and all these traditions do that one way or another.

Now, throughout our midweek Advent series we have talked about these things: faith, hope, joy, and love.

And today, to add to that mix we include peace.

With faith, hope, joy, and love, ultimately with all of those also comes peace.

And, at this point in the sermon, I could get very political and talk about peace as the absence of war.

At this point in the sermon I could even get very philosophical and talk about peace, defined as the mind that is unperturbed by all the worldly concerns around it.

I could talk about peace in those ways—philosophically and politically, and so on.

But, today, I choose to talk about peace that derives from the traditions we hold sacred, especially around the time of Christmas.

And we must remember that all these traditions rose up around the central message of Christmas, which is that God has given us a Savior.

And if those aliens from space couldn't appreciate the traditions as pointing to the central message of Christmas, then good riddance.

They missed something beautiful.

For, in truth, we have these traditions to help us appreciate all the more the gift of Christmas, God's Son Jesus Christ.

We have these traditions and they really do instill a sense of peace into our lives at this time of year, because these traditions have the uncanny ability to speak to us time and time, and time again.

They speak of faith, of hope, of joy, and of love, and ultimately then, these traditions speak of peace.

For traditions, if nothing else should comfort us, should provide some sense of reassurance...

They provide routine, they provide a sense of normalcy within our practice of celebrating the Christmas holiday.

Traditions provide routine, reassurance, normalcy, and so traditions instill peace into our lives.

Even if we don't always know why it is we do what we do, with respect to our traditions.

Why do we kiss under a twig any way?

And, I could go into the meaning of all those traditions I have already mentioned, but that would greatly extend the length of this sermon, and we all want to be get out of here at a reasonable hour to enjoy the rest of our holiday traditions.

And so, I would encourage you to investigate at your leisure the Christian traditions we subscribe to, to understand why it is we do what we do.

Let me just conclude then by reiterating that our traditions are so very good, they are so very much a blessing, for they instill a sense of peace into our lives.

So, when you are sitting around your Christmas tree today, and you are wondering, “Yea, why do we pay homage to a man in a big red suit with a white beard, whom we say watches us when we’re sleeping and knows when we’re awake? That’s just creepy.”

So when you are sitting around your Christmas tree today, just remember, the traditions that have come down to us are peace instilling, peace inspiring. And in the celebration of those traditions, may the PEACE of Christ be with you always.

Merry Christmas.