

Christmas Eve begs the question of all children traveling to Grandma’s house for Christmas: “When are we going to get there? Are we there yet?”

For one thing, where we’re headed on Christmas Eve is not a point in time.

Yes, there is a square marked on the December calendar that says ‘Christmas.’ But we all know that date is only a guess. The first date celebrated as the birth of Jesus, as far as we know, was January 2.

For many years in many places Christmas was observed in the springtime. Sometimes it was May 20 or April 19 or March 25.

Many think it was Pope Julius in the 4th century who chose December 25 because it was already a recognized holiday among the non-Christian culture, and the Christians wouldn’t be noticed celebrating their own special day.

But Christmas Eve is not really about getting to a point in time.

And as you think about what Christmas has become for so many people, we need to say also that where we’re going is not a place of possessions.

I remember my grandmother would go out in the fall to their farm and pick up pecans to sell – she called it her “Christmas money.”

And I loved my grandmother and some of that Christmas money was spent on me – but Christmas is not money or what it buys for you and me that is wrapped and sitting under the tree.

I read about a woman, and this could be any of us, who got caught up in the Christmas

rush and just a few days before Christmas remembered that she had not mailed any Christmas cards. She hurried out, bought some cards, sat in the Post Office parking lot, signed them, address labels on them, stamps, got them in the mail.

When she got home, she had a few left over and was looking at them. She liked the card, a beautiful scene of Bethlehem with the manger on the front and a nice greeting inside.

But then she noticed something that in her haste to get the cards mailed she had not seen: a small inscription down in the corner of the card had this message: “A gift is on the way.”

(Can you imagine how she felt – No, she didn’t laugh.)
So it was for the people of Israel who knew the inscription that Micah had sent in his word from God: *From Bethlehem of Ephrathah shall come the one who is to rule for me...and he shall be the one of peace.*

Micah says it prophetically; Luke tells the story physically...what Christmas Eve is all about: A gift is on the way!

And that gift is not a point a time, not a place of possessions, the gift that is on the way is a person.

We wait and prepare, prepare and wait, and into this world, our world, our home, our lives comes this person, this gift, this baby!

We all know how a baby changes everything – and this baby, in particular, changes everything for you and me.

It’s all in the name that changes everything, as Matthew tells us in his gospel, this baby

is named Jesus, “for he will save his people from their sins.”

But how can a baby save us from our sins? How can one baby change the world, save the world?

Would it help you any if we said it this way: He will save his people from themselves - how we destroy ourselves and each other.

Whether it’s self-righteous indignation or self-inflicted choices, whether it’s terrorist’s bombs or incendiary lies - both maim and kill.

This baby is Christmas, for in this child we see God’s gift that God so loved the world he gave us his only Son to save us from our selfish and our self-destructive ways.

In this child, we see God; in this child we see God’s love for the world.

As Alden Solovy’s poem Lesser Children helps us understand:

*The least of Your children,
G-d of compassion,
Are mirrors of Your creation.
The hidden and the unwanted,
The drifter and the locked away,
The lonely and the desolate,
The pauper, the streetwalker, the homeless,
Those who yearn
And those who rail in madness,
Echo Your voice.
Where is mercy?
Where is kindness?
Where is justice?
Where is ‘tikun olam’? (repair of the world)*

*The least of Your children,
G-d of righteousness,
Are ours to bless
With the gifts You have given us.
In Your name*

*We will take to the streets,
We will go out into the country side,
We will serve Your law and Your truth,
By repairing the world.*

*The least of Your children,
G-d of healing,
Are our sisters and brothers.
Let us build a ‘sukkat shalom’,
A tabernacle of peace,
Over all in need.*

That is why Christmas is a baby named Jesus – for when you hold a baby, you realize how much you can hurt them, but we know that baby cannot hurt us.

John Vannorsdall, a wonderful preacher, points to this truth when he says that “one of the meanings of Christmas is that God doesn’t want to hurt you or me. He desires that we receive him and not be afraid.” Not to be afraid of God or each other.

It is why the Word of God comes to us as a child into a world that surely could be condemned by God, for the violence we do to each other and to ourselves.

It is why the Word of God comes to us as a child whom we must hold and care for and feed and love; a baby - truly one who comes as the least of these among us...truly a ‘sukkat shalom’, a tabernacle of peace.

What if this Christmas we would hold each other as we hold a baby - tenderly, caring, knowing we hold the gift of God’s love and life itself?

What if, this Christmas, we would treat all people as the person who is the gift of Christmas: Jesus, our Savior?

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.