

**What Will This Christmas Be Like?**  
**Sermon on Hebrews 12:18-24**  
**Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI**  
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**Introduction: What Will This Christmas Be Like?**

God promised Mary on our behalf: *You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.* Amen.

Dear fellow Christians—starting to get ready for Christmas:

What will this Christmas be like?

I mean: we're all aware of the troubling economic circumstances. In fact, it's more than a little scary: the failure of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, with a crushing impact on the housing market, then almost a complete unavailability of credit in some sectors, then an unprecedented seven hundred billion dollar economic bailout by the government, then a bunch of other industries lining up for governmental money in order to avoid bankruptcy, plus this past autumn's stock market crash.

Meantime: such scary economic news at a distance impacts every life inside this church. Obviously, we might wonder, will this Christmas allow for any gifts under the tree? Or more seriously, will even manage to pay our outstanding bills? Will our income keep up? Will we even manage to retain our jobs? Or will we, personally, fall into bankruptcy?

WHAT WILL THIS CHRISTMAS BE LIKE? Well, God's Word tells us: BECAUSE OF OUR SIN, IT SHOULD BE TERRIFYING (AS MOUNT SINAI WAS), but BECAUSE OF OUR SAVIOR, IT WILL BE THRILLING (AS MOUNT ZION IS).

**Part One: Because of Our Sin, Christmas Should Be Terrifying  
(Like Mount Sinai Was)**

Today is an interesting point in the church's year: the first day of all. It has us pausing and preparing before Christ's coming. That means that our situation is not so very different from the people right before the time of Jesus' birth. They paused and prepared and wondered: What will Christmas – the very first Christmas of all – be like? And you can understand them wondering why it might actually be quite scary: because that's the way it was the last time God came to meet with them.

They remembered that their ancestors, fifteen hundred years before Christ, had met God: two hundred miles to their south at Mount Sinai—a nine thousand foot tall pillar of rock, thirty desert miles away from the sea in any one of three directions. Those people remembered – and this is God's Word to us today – that they had: ... *come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire* – can you imagine? a whole huge mountain on fire! – they had come *to darkness, gloom and storm* – that's the way it was that day: supernaturally scary! – they had come *to a trumpet blast* – out of nowhere, and – *to such a voice* – God's voice! – *speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them* – they were so scared – *because they could not bear what was commanded* – namely – *"If even an animal* – let alone a person, so much as – *touches the mountain, it must be stoned* – to death!" In fact, *The sight was so terrifying that Moses* – Moses, that great man and God's friend! – *Moses said, "I am trembling with fear"* – pretty literally, "I'm scared out of my wits".

Now, is that what this Christmas is going to be like? Well, really, it should be.

First of all, all the scary economic indicators I talked about before—don't think that they exist apart from our own guilty sinfulness. I want what's not mine to have. And my sinful nature tells me that if I can use somebody else's money to get it – and better, without paying it back – I should. I want to evade responsibility for my decisions. And my sinful nature tells me that if I can get somebody else to bail me out of my bad economic decisions—good! I don't want to work hard for my money. And my sinful nature tells me that if I can lead my family to live off somebody else—more power to me! And your sinful nature is no less evil, no less guilty, than mine.

Now, how should God react to us? Should he not come with *fire, darkness, gloom, storm, a trumpet blast, and a terrifying voice*—to send us straight to hell?! That's the way the first Christmas should have been. That's the way this Christmas ought to be.

## **Part Two: Because of Our Savior, Christmas Will Be Thrilling (Like Mount Zion Is)**

But amazingly – astoundingly! – God has got a different and glorious message for us, as we pause and prepare for Christmas. He says: ***But you have come*** – not to Mount Sinai – rather ***to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.***

*Mount Zion*—what's that? Well, it was the lofty hill in Jerusalem on which God's temple was situated. To an Israelite that was a most welcome sight. Three times a year, Zion was the destination of his family's vacation. That's where God dwelled specially: not in terror, but in mercy. Zion was where sacrifices were made that kept each Israelite acceptable to God.

And that's what Christmas is going to be for you, too. It's a happy destination for your family's vacation. It's the day on which God came to dwell with us: not in terror with a big loud voice, but in mercy with a baby's still small voice. Christmas is God coming to earth personally to tell you that he considers you acceptable to him.

At Christmas: ***You have come*** – it says further – ***to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly.*** Can you imagine?! It would be incredible one time to get a glimpse of one angel. Even though angels are constantly helping us, we don't see them in their invisibility. What a sight it would be actually to see literally *tens of thousands* of them! This Christmas, that's what you're going to see! And what will they say? *Today in the city of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ, the Lord.* Wow!

At Christmas: You have come – it says – ***to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.*** To an Israelite, the *firstborn* boys were the fortunate ones. They'd get a double share of the family's inheritance; it was their children, especially, who would carry on the family name and property. It says here that: in the New Testament, every one of us is the firstborn. Christmas will mean that each of us will inherit from Jesus a full share of heavenly glory. After all, he has died for us, so as to bequeath to us an inheritance. And our *names are written in heaven!* God wants you to know that right there right now your name is on the membership rolls of glory.

Finally, at Christmastime: ***You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect.*** Your spirit is one of those righteous spirits for the sake of Jesus Christ! And you have come ***to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant.*** That means that Jesus has signed in his blood a treaty of peace between you and God—eternal peace, where there once was war, because of your sins. ***And*** you have come ***to the sprinkled blood*** of Jesus ***that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*** Abel's blood?—it *cried out of the ground* to God for vengeance upon his brother Cain for killing him. Jesus' blood fell to the ground, too—and it cries out. But it cries out for God's mercy on you and me; his blood fell to the ground in vengeance upon our transgressions.

## **Conclusion: Jesus Will Make This Christmas a Joy!**

Doesn't all of that sound wonderful?! So, what will this Christmas be like?

Well, it is entirely possible that economic activity will be slow. It is completely possible that you and I will be giving and receiving fewer gifts this year. In fact, the new years to come may not cure our economic problems. Our sins – although Christ has graciously forgiven them – still have their consequences.

But will you eat and be clothed and be sheltered this Christmas and into the coming year? Yeah. Whole flocks of sparrows will survive the winter, lilies will bloom in the spring, and our gracious God will take care of you for Jesus' sake.

Furthermore, this Christmas will be exactly like Christmas in the past was for us. God is coming to visit us! We will celebrate once again that God cherished your soul to such a degree that he stepped into this world – and at first, as an infant: imagine! – in order to rescue you. And again this Christmas, God will visit your spirit by way of his Word.

Furthermore, if money troubles serve to focus our eyes more clearly on Christ this Christmas, we will actually thank God for them. And if an economic downturn reminds us that the best way to invest our money is in the proclamation of Jesus as our Savior from sin, we will thank God for that, too.

Either way, the same good God who graciously gave to us his Son is going to be worthy of our praise: until Christmas, on Christmas, and through this Christmas—forever! Amen.

God promised Mary on our behalf: *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.... For nothing is impossible with God. Amen.*