

A Question of Priorities

Luke 2:1-20

Is there a busier season in the whole year? I suppose if you're an accountant, you would say, "Yes, just before April 15th." Maybe if you're a teacher you would say, "Yes, the last two weeks of August."

But for most of us, each year this is the busiest, and perhaps most stress-filled time of the whole year.

We're all busy trying to create the perfect Christmas for ourselves and our families. Well, that's not entirely true; in our house my wife, Bonnie, creates that special Christmas ambience each year. I don't really get into the spirit of things until about 2 days or so before Christmas. But in the weeks before Christmas, between working full time, buying gifts for our children and grandchildren, baking, cooking, decorating, wrapping, and signing each Christmas card with a personal note her life is insanely busy and stressful. I help out a little, but she does, by far, the lion's share.

So I see her operating from lists, detailing what has to be accomplished each day in the weeks approaching Christmas. Like most people who really get into the spirit of the holiday, she prioritizes. Is it more efficient to bake today, or shop today? Should I address cards today or go shopping? And there are certain criteria that drive the decisions of what priority each task

will receive. In the days after Thanksgiving, shopping takes a priority because the stores are still filled with merchandise. In the days closer to Christmas, cooking and baking take priority so that things will be fresh. Writing cards and wrapping gifts can be relegated to evenings, while shopping for gifts has to be done while the stores are open. Of course, all of this has to be done around a framework of parties and dinners. This year, sadly, a friend's mother passed away, so attending her funeral service in King George immediately went to the top of our priority list.

You, I'm sure, had your own list of tasks to be accomplished, parties to attend, and perhaps, special events that are part of your holiday celebration. Each event, each task received its own priority.

And, when the season is over, you will, like most of us, collapse, hopefully, with that sense of accomplishment and peace that attends a job well done, or a project that turns out just right.

Of course, priority setting won't stop just because Christmas is past. It's part of everyday life. Some of us, like my wife, do it very deliberately and conscientiously and intentionally. Some of us, like me, tend to let life dictate the flow of priorities, and run around scrambling to meet deadlines and put out fires. Whatever your style, you set priorities.

I'd like to share with you a letter from a six-year old boy to Santa Claus this year. It's very much about priorities. This is not your standard Christmas list letter to Santa. This little guy just wanted to make something clear to Santa Claus before Christmas got here.

It reads like this:

Dear Santa,

You're number three. [At this point, the boy's mom, who read the letter, was thinking, "Oh, boy, his mom and dad are number one and two. We beat out Santa Claus in his affections." No such luck. The letter went on like this.]

Number one: God

Number two: Jesus the Saver

Number three: Santa

So, Mom and Dad were tied for fourth place.

By the way, this is not one of those things someone sends you on the internet where you're never quite sure if it's true or not. This one is for real. I know because the little boy is our grandson, Fisher. And I'm sure that any other day of the year, Mom and Dad would be tied for third.

But how's that for a set of priorities, huh? Pretty risky for a 6-year old to be that honest with Santa so close to Christmas, telling him

he's not in that top slot. I haven't asked him why he felt the need to write the letter, or if he had any misgivings about possibility alienating the jolly old elf so close to Christmas.

But I sure can't fault his priorities.

Obviously, we all made a choice this evening. It was your priority, in the midst of all the busy-ness and demands of this moment to be in God's house to worship Him for His incredible gift to humanity. You set aside everything else to be here to hear the angels' announcement of God's great love for mankind, manifested in the giving of His most precious gift, His own Son.

I can't think of a better decision.

There are those who like to pick apart the holiday. I've done it myself. We talk about the fact that we don't really know when Jesus was born, and it may actually have been in the springtime. We discuss when the Wise Men actually came and that they probably didn't see Jesus in the stable as our creche's typically depict. We wonder about the star and whether it was a special creation or a rare but natural phenomenon. An article I recently read speculated about whether the Greek word usually translated as "inn" in Luke's Gospel should actually be translated "Guest Room." There are those who point out that Pope Julius or Constantine are responsible for Christmas being celebrated on

December 25 and that is was actually a time of pagan festivals that the early church “baptized”, so to speak.

All of which is interesting and food for thought. But in list of the holiday’s priorities, it’s all pretty far down. Overarching any discussion of Christmas is this reality: God came among us as one of us! Whether it was in winter or spring, witnessed by shepherds and Wise Men, or only shepherds that night, whether it was the stable of an inn or a private home, this fact has absolute priority: God became one of us in the form of a tiny, helpless baby; God entered into the history He had created. He came on a rescue mission to do for people what we could not do ourselves. He came to save us from the eternal, fatal effects of our rebellion against Him. This Child, whose coming we celebrate, came for one overarching purpose: to die to take the punishment for all the sins of everyone who would ever live. He came to purchase for us what was priceless to us, what we could never earn for ourselves: forgiveness and eternal life. He came to repair what we had broken and could not fix: our relationship with Him. And He offers those gifts freely to all who believe in Him, no strings attached. Fisher had it right: Jesus is the Saver, the only One who can save us from punishment for our sins; the only One who can save us for eternity.

That’s why we’re here; that’s what this is all about. It’s good news – the best news. And it’s good news, not just for Christmas,

but for every day of every year of all of our lives. It is life-changing, life-directing, life-giving.

C.S. Lewis, the great Christian writer and apologist, was absolutely clear what priority this Savior had in his life. He said this:
“Christianity is

A new year stretches out before us. It’s a good thing that it comes so close to Christmas because it gives us the opportunity to ask ourselves each year, “What will be my priority in the new year?”
What place will my Saver, Jesus, have in my life this year?”