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Christ in Christmas
Luke 2:10-11

VIDEO begins:

"I'm Stuart Shepherd, this is public. I love this time of year! When the nations largest retailers go way out of their way to wish me a *happy non-specified holiday*. Eddie Bower sent me their *holiday* book. Some outfit, called *HearthSong*, offered me *holiday* savings. *Shutterfly* wants me to create a *holiday* card with *holiday* designs to spread the *holiday* cheer. I'm sure some company spokesperson is about to jump out of his or her chair right now to say, "But, what we mean is *all* these wonderful *holidays*." They all want me to buy *holiday* gifts.

When was the last time you heard someone say, "What are you buying your kids for Thanksgiving this year?" You know, I've never seen them feel the need to combine their Valentines Day and President's Day sales. Since so many retailers seem to be having a problem remembering that other name for December 25th, at my house I've created a *special holiday*, just for retailers. I call it, "Tossmas."

I get a copy of *Crate and Barrel Holiday*, I don't even open it. I just say, "Merry Tossmas." *Lillian Vernon* says she's very excited to share this holiday season with me. I figure that must include "Tossmas." *QVC* sends me gourmet *holiday*, "Feliz Navi-Toss." *LL Bean* sent me a *holiday* catalog and a Christmas catalog, now you are speaking my language.

Look, big retailers, who want my money, I know you are just trying not to *offend* people but just so you know; *You are offending us!* You know, I actually like some of your stuff and I may still buy something from you, but here, let me speak your language.

Who is more likely to look through your holiday catalogs to buy your Christmas decorations, your Christmas cards, and your Christmas gifts? Someone in the more than ninety percent of Americans who celebrate Christmas or someone who claims to be *offended* by the very word? **Merry Christmas.**"

VIDEO ends.

You know, really, we are the ones that are the bearers of the light in talking about Merry Christmas. I mean, He is our Lord, Savior, and Jesus Christ and this season is about *Christ in Christmas*. This morning's message is about *keeping Christ in Christmas*. Time and time again we find ways where that is trying to be snatched away, or stolen away, or tried to be reinvented through this celebration of the holidays. It is a holiday, in a manner of speaking, but it's a *specific* holiday. It's the holiday of Christmas. I said, "Christ-mas" where Christ has come to us. We see it stolen away.

How many of you all read this past week, it's this little blurb I saw; I'm a news junkie to be honest with you (you know something about me. I'm just a news junkie. I look at news sites every day.). I ran across this article that says that now Congressmen cannot send out cards that say Merry Christmas on them if you want it to be paid for by the public or through tax dollars. It's called, "franking." When your Congressman sends you a card and it's paid by tax dollars, it's called "franking."

There is a Franking Commission. I don't think that they lack for commissions or committees in Washington, how about you? Always got something and overseeing something. What this Franking Commission has determined is that you cannot do anything that says *Merry Christmas* on it and be paid by the tax payers. If you want to do it, if your Congressman sends you one and it says *Merry Christmas*, you need to know that came out of his budget. He determined that he was not going to give in to the holiday, "what do we want to call that?" It's *Merry Christmas*.

Also, it's just taking place. There is this organization called, Freedom from Religion. Have you heard of this group out of Wisconsin? Can you imagine it came out of Wisconsin, right? This organization called, the Freedom from Religion Foundation, basically goes around, and tries to police anything that has anything to do with Christmas in a public setting.

You may have heard down in Athens, Texas, (my neck of the woods) in East Texas, there is this nativity scene. They are trying to get it taken off the courthouse steps. It was put there by private individuals. They are saying, "You've got to do that." Athens had a big rally this weekend saying, "We are not going to do anything, come make us. This is Texas, don't mess with us". I always like that slogan, I don't know about you. There's always a natural arrogance with us Texans, have you ever noticed that? Those of you who've moved here, you know what I am talking about.

This same group wants to go up into Pitman, New Jersey. You may have seen this one about a sign that is strung across a public street; but it's posted between two private buildings, and basically the sign says, "*Keeping Christ in Christmas*". What's offensive about that? Well, to this group it's offensive. They have determined that they are going to try and bring action to get it taken down, though it's attached to private buildings. They couldn't get that done, so this is what they have decided to do. They are going to put up their own banner.

I want to read to you what this banner says: (you are going to love this) "*At this season of the Winter Solstice...* (Anybody know what the Winter Solstice is? Yeah, I know you do, but I am just a country boy and I don't know anything.) "*At this season of the Winter Solstice, may reason prevail...*" ("reason," so you are "unreasonable" if you are thinking Christmas.) "*...There are no gods, no devils, no angels, no heaven or hell. There is only our natural world. Religion is but a myth and superstition that hardens the hearts and enslaves the minds.*"...says one of their representatives.

(Source:http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/onfaith/christmas-banner-causes-big-spat-in-small-nj-town/2011/12/23/gIOAXC01DP_story.html)

I want to tell you something, when you start making statements, "*There's no angels, no devils, no heaven, no hell,*" that in itself is a faith statement. It's a faith statement. How can you say that? You had to say it by faith. Just as we say there is by faith, they say there isn't by faith. Of course we know our faith is a saving faith. Unfortunately theirs is not. That's why it's important for us to be here.

When you start thinking about reasonable people, you're only reasonable if you agree that "*it's only our natural order, natural world around us.*" Well, I don't know. That seems fairly unreasonable to me. They say that, "*Religion is but a myth, and it...*" Does what?..."*hardens the heart and*"...Does what to the mind?..."*enslaves the mind.*"

Now, I don't know about you, but who seems to have the hard heart here? I think they missed the irony of that whole situation. We can't because it's not so much that we are going to go out on campaigns and look to put up billboards and signs reminding people about Christmas, that *Christ is the reason for Christmas*.

Do you know what Jesus has done? He has made every one of us an ambassador; every one of us is a billboard that says, "Christmas is all about Christ". You are that billboard. You are that sign that goes out into the work place, out into the market place, wherever that may be. We are the ones, we who believe in Christ, we are the ones who go out and tell the world, "No, really, it's not just a good holiday, it's not just a few days off of work, this season really has a meaning. It is a celebration of Immanuel, God with us."

That first Scripture that we are about to see there out of Luke, chapter 2, reminds us of that. It says, *"¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy. It is for all the people. ¹¹ "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord." (New International Reader's Version)*

That's our message. That's the good news, that we are the billboard, we are the placard, and we are the ones saying that *Christ is the reason for the season*. When we begin to see this, "Ok, pastor, I know that. I've been brought up knee high from a grasshopper knowing that that's what Christmas is all about. I celebrate Christmas. I enjoy Christmas with my family."

What we are to remember, among ourselves, is not only do we not know these things about *Christ in Christmas*, but we are to tell other people. Now, granted, some are going to think you are unreasonable. Some of are going to think that your mind has been enslaved by that religion, who is nothing but a myth. The truth of the matter is, the truth is only found in Christ, the *Christ of Christmas*. Amen?

I want to give you today four things that you can think about. Four things that we are going to appropriate to ourselves and not just apply to ourselves, but four things that we can also carry about this billboard of our life that says, "*Keeping Christ in Christmas*."

The first one is this: *Keeping Christ in Christmas releases my fears*. When I *keep Christ in Christmas* it releases my fears. I can just make it real simple for you. If I only believe in this natural order around me, if I only believe in that and I think that religion is a myth and I think it enslaves the mind and hardens the heart. If I think of all that then when I begin to encounter things that bring about fear to my life, let's just make a quick list.

What are some things that bring fear into your life? (Somebody from this side of the room. Y'all are scared of me. I just don't. Wake up! Come on now. This is being recorded. People are going to listen. Give me something.)

"Death of a spouse," that would be one." "Tornadoes" (Tornadoes, did you say tornadoes in December?) "Earthquakes" (We have a lot of those here, too.) Alright, Tornadoes, Earthquakes, natural things. Somebody from the middle over here..."Uncertainty" (Fear of the unknown.) "Jobs." (I'm surprised no one has said the economy yet. I mean that just seems to be on the front page.) Somebody to my left. "Spiders." (Spiders? Arachnophobia, ok. I'll give you that one.) We are just getting a little more weird as we go on so we better stop. A little more outlandish, not weird, nothing weird about that.

Though when you think about that, which part of that from tornadoes to earthquakes to jobs, economy to spiders, which do you find in the natural world that will bring your relief from all that? Nothing. Nothing, whatsoever.

What is it that we believe that brings us through all that? Faith. I *keep Christ in Christmas* because it releases my fears. The angel said to them, "*Do not be afraid*." Have you ever noticed in Scripture every

time somebody encounters God or a Word from God, a messenger of God called an angel, what is that first response? Do you know what it is? It's just like they've fallen over like they are dead. Now they really didn't die, but what it is saying is that they are petrified by the encounter with the otherness. When the natural meets the supernatural there is basically a paralysis or a fear that comes over them and this is what was happening at the announcement of Christ's birth. The angel said, "*Do not be afraid.*"

Beloved, we *keep Christ in Christmas* because it reminds us that we are not to be dictated or live our lives based upon fear. What does fear do? Fear causes paralysis. Fear causes us to allow our emotions to override what we would call the factual, our rational thinking. It begins to cause us to paralyze in such a place. Matter of fact, FDR says, "The only thing that we have to fear..." Is what? "... fear itself." You paid attention in school, very good.

"The only thing you have to fear is fear itself." Why is fear of the unknown, as it was said back there, why is that fear of the unknown? Because it creates a paralysis singularly but also corporately among us. If that's what fear does then what should faith do?

Look what it says in 1 John 4:18, "*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.*" (NIV)

Why did Christ come to this earth? Because God loves us. (We are going to look at that verse in just a moment.) Because God loves us and because we understand, we embrace by faith, the love of God and the person of Christ who came at Christmas, that we celebrate, it means it drives out the fear.

I say it to you like this, Scripturally speaking. *Fear is faith in the wrong thing. Faith is fear in the right thing.* Does that make sense? Scripturally speaking, Fear is faith in the wrong thing, the tornado, the earthquake, the spiders. It's fear in those things, that's having faith in those, that those things can harm me. Scripturally speaking, faith is fearing the right thing and that thing being (personification) Jesus Christ.

When I have my faith in Christ then I no longer have to fear. I can be smart about those other things. When a tornado comes I get in the root cellar. I understand that. When you became a Christian your brains didn't fall out your head. What we do with our faith is that we begin to understand that it rides over our fears.

Do you know why this world is in such a pickle? We are in such a pickle because we are guided by fear. We are guided by fear when really we've been liberated and we should be guided by faith. Christmas is about knowing that God loved me so much that He sent His son, in the flesh, to die on the cross for my sins. I respond to that by faith, not out of fear. Fear is faith in the wrong thing and faith is fear in the right thing, so begin to understand that.

Do you know in the Bible, 355 times in the Scripture, it says, "*Fear not.*" Does that number ring a bell? How many days are in a year? Hey, once a day, how about that. Coincidental? No. Every day we know that we are to rise and not live in fear, but rather faith.

Christmas reminds me of that. Christmas reminds me that God loved me so much that He came into this world, that He invaded this world, that He came to this world, in order for us to have a faith response to Him. That is the message that the world needs to hear. You live by faith; you're the billboard of faith to live out, not by fear, but by faith.

If all we do, as believers, go around and talk about, "Woe is me and woe is this and woe, what are we going to do?" We are like little Henny Penny running around, "The sky is falling!" If we are doing that then what confidence does the world have in our God? I wouldn't have much confidence in a God like that, would you? So, *keep Christ in Christmas*. Celebrate the faith response we have in Him and it will release us from our fears.

Here is the second thing it does: It renews our faith. The angel said to us, "*I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.*" That word there talking about the "*good news,*" really, literally in the Greek that's what it means, "The good news; it's the *God news.*" What he is saying, the angel appears and says that, "God is bringing some news to you and it is for all people." We live in a world where bad news seems to be just surrounding us, doesn't it? As a matter of fact the worse the world gets the better the good news looks, right?

When you contrast the two, "Man, you say there are some bad things going on around us?" Yes there are. When I contrast that with the good news of liberation that I come in my relationship with Christ, the good news sounds even better, doesn't it? Well, sure it does. We need to remember that. Christ, we keep Him in Christmas because it reminds us that the good news, the God news, has come to everyone. That you can have a relationship with Christ our Lord, that, too, is the message the world needs to hear.

What is that good news? Let me give you three things real quick about what the good news is. We can make a list longer than our arms in doing this.

Here is the first one: *You matter to God*. The good news is that *you matter to God*. Warts and all, God loves you. Warts and all, no matter how strange you are or how strange people say you are, God says, "*I love you.*" Now, there are some people in this world who are unlovable, right? I mean, they just seem that way. I kind of joked in the first service, this morning, and if you don't know who those people are – you are that person! You catch on real quick. God loves you and you matter to God, very personally, *you matter to God*.

Here's the second thing about that: *You are not an accident*. Long before you were conceived in the mind of your parents, you were conceived in the heart of God. There are only surprise babies; there are no accidental babies because God has a purpose and a plan for everyone. God has a plan for your life because you matter to God and God says, "You know what? You may be a surprise baby but you were conceived in My heart a long time ago and I've got a purpose for your life". Jeremiah tells us that God has a plan for us, a good purpose. "A plan to prosper you, not to harm you but a plan to do good for you."

Do you know that God has good plans for you? He really does. You say, "My life stinks right now. I can't see how that's a good plan." That's because you are looking through the eyes of fear and not faith. God is weaving the tapestry of your life right now and you can't imagine what God is doing but just trust me by faith. If you will walk with God you will discover that you matter to God and that your life is not an accident. This life is not just sequences of occasions or circumstance that come to you and you try to figure it all out, God has a purpose. He says, "I want you to see Me in everything."

God looks to help those to know Him better. That's it. God wants to know us better. That's what the incarnation is about. That's what this baby is all about, that God wants us to know Him better.

I remember a story. If God wanted to reach birds, He would have come as a bird. If God wanted to reach dogs, He would have come as a dog. To illustrate that—a story that I heard about a little boy. He is sleeping in his room, it's kind of lightening and it's dark, he cries out to his dad and says, "Daddy, I'm

scared of the dark." The father says, "Well, just come in here and get in bed with me and grab your teddy bear." He says, "Daddy, I want something with skin on it." That's where we are. We want a God with skin on Him.

Philippians, chapter 2, says, that is Christ. *We keep Christ in Christmas* because we identify with Him. He identified with us first. "*Here in is love, not that we love God, but that He first loved us.*" (1 John 4:19) He loved you so much that He came to know you better so that you might know Him better.

You may be saying, "Preacher, I didn't go to seminary. I haven't done this." Look, you've got the owner's manual, called a Bible, just like I do. You've got the Holy Spirit of God in you, just like I do. It's this idea of knowing more about God, you've got to spend time with God, otherwise God seems like a stranger to you. We get to know God through our relationship with Him. What happens is that we keep Christ there and it begins to move us closer to Him.

Here's a third thing: *It reassures me of my forgiveness.* When I *keep Christ in Christmas* I understand that it reassures me of my own forgiveness. Look what it says in verse 11, "*Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord.*" What has been born for us? "*A Savior.*"

What if it had said, "Today in the town of David a salesman has been born for you?" What would you think? Well, God thinks I need more product. Do you got enough products in your world? You going to get some more products from underneath the tree that you are going to go, "What in the world am I going to do with this?"

Does anybody have a Christmas gift that is left in the closet that's been there for a while that you take out when the relatives come over? We've got some little brass cranes from my wife's grandmother one time and they were just tacky to be honest with you so we put them away and whenever she would come over you would take them out and put them out. Why? Because, you love them, that's why.

The thing about it is that God didn't say, "I sent you a salesman because you need more product." It doesn't say there even, "That in the town of David a scientist has been born for you, he's Christ the Lord." What would we get from a scientist? If we had been given a scientist, by God, we would have gotten more information. I don't need more information, what I need is a Savior. How about you? I need a Savior because I'm not perfect.

When I think about *keeping Christ in Christmas* it says that a Savior's been given to me. For someone to save me, means that someone is in peril. Right? I mean, if I'm not in peril then I don't need a Savior. Because my life is in peril and this world is in peril, then we need a Savior.

In John 3:16 (we talked about it just a moment ago) it says, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be...*" There's that word. "*...saved.*"

Keeping Christ in Christmas reminds me that a Savior's been born and that someone is in peril. That someone is, me. I'm in peril. This world's in peril and we need a Savior. Why is it important for us to go from or not accept "Happy Holidays"? There's a warm fuzzy about that, "Happy Holidays." How can you have a problem with either one of those words? "Happy," that's a good word, I don't have a problem with happy. Anybody got a problem with happy? (This little boy raised his hand down here and you go,

"Put your hand down. No, no. That's not the part we agree with the preacher on." Thank you. You're just trying to help me out. I appreciate that very much.)

I'm not opposed to happy and neither are you. I'd much rather be happy than sad. How about a holiday? Everybody like holidays? I love holidays. Over in Europe, when you go on a vacation, that's what they call it. You are "going on a holiday." There's a good connotation to that. Holiday, that's a good word, but it is still not sufficient to capture what we are experiencing at Christmas.

It is not sufficient. It falls far short of that because it keeps Christ out. When it keeps Christ out it keeps the Savior out and when I keep a Savior out I don't have to be reminded that my life is lost or in peril; that I need saving. I can go on in my lostness as long as I want to, being "happy and on holiday." There's the world for you. This world is "happy and on a holiday" right now, away from God.

Unfortunately, the phrase, "Ignorance is bliss," comes into play here. What is ignorant? It means you just don't know. That's all ignorant means, "I don't know." Ignorance doesn't mean that you are stupid; it just means you don't know. This world doesn't know, but this world can know, and how are they going to know? Through you and me. That's how they are going to know. They are going to need to know that they need a Savior.

It reminds me that I've been forgiven. *I keep Christ in Christmas* because it reminds me that I've been forgiven and that other people need forgiveness as well and that I am God's billboard to say, "*Keep Christ in Christmas* because God loves you so much, you matter to Him so much, He wants to forgive you."

Everybody knows they are not perfect. I have yet to meet a person, unless they are delusional, I have yet to meet a person who would say, "I have no sin." I did have a little girl one time, in Vacation Bible School, and I was talking to her since she came forward and wanted to accept Christ as her Savior. I asked her a question, "Do you know what sin is?" She kind of named off a few things. "Have you ever sinned?" "No." I knew she wasn't ready, but everybody cognitively of that age, knows they've sinned. You are not perfect. None of us are.

Heaven is such a glorious place, such a wonderful place, it's such a wonderful place because God is there, that's why it's so wonderful. I want to go there, don't you? If I phrase it that way and I tell you how it's just "splendor unimaginable," that's what the apostle Paul said. Yet, if I were to show up there in my imperfect state it would make a perfect place imperfect because I showed up, if I can say it this way, with mud on my feet. Any of you wives make your husband take the boots off in the back because they got mud on them? Make sure it doesn't track up the house. Sure you do. Why? Because it's clean. "I've cleaned house all day. You take your shoes off, kids, before you come in." Why? Because you know it's going to mess things up.

There is no way that I can get clean enough for God, is there? Some people, I was talking to somebody this past week talking about the idea of salvation. They think that it's just the concept of "do more good." "I know I'm bad, I know I'm imperfect; that I have sin. If I do enough good things then maybe it'll outweigh." Listen, your life is not in the balance. Your eternal life is not about balancing the scales or outweighing good versus bad. What it is saying, that God is Holy and it just takes one sin for me to imperfect. No, what it's really about is about a gift. It's about a gift. It's about a Christ child who came as our Savior to give us eternal life so that we can be forgiven, so we can talk to other people about forgiving.

Now, if I make it really personally now, not only that we might be forgiven with God, but that we might *forgive other people*. That's going to be our next point. I'm just going to transition right into it. *We are able to give forgiveness and rebuild the friendships and relationships.*

You see the first relationship, it says, "*Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace good will toward men.*" What God is saying is that He is bringing peace. When Christ comes to this world He came to bring peace to man's heart because our hearts were not peaceful. We know that we are not perfect. He says that, "*I come to give you peace that there might be good will.*" What does that mean? It means basically that there can be a relationship between us and God, but it all started in the mind and heart of God in a little bitty baby who is Christ our Lord. That's why we *keep Christ in Christmas.*

It reminds us that we can rebuild friendships and relationships, first, with God. You can come into a Christ relationship that you believe by faith because of God's grace. You believe this Christ child grew up to be a man and that He lived a perfect life. He didn't have "mud on his shoes," so to speak. He lived a perfect life and He died on a cross because of our imperfection or our sin, that's why He went to the cross to die and resurrected three days later. Hallelujah, that's the wonderful thing between Christmas and Easter, the package deal with God. That's the good news.

Then that good news must branch out to us. This will get really accountable here. Of where we have peace and good will with other people, because what happens here is that you are going to go to some Christmas parties and you are going to go to some family gatherings and you are going to encounter some people that you do not have peace with. There is going to be somebody that you hope does not show up. Why? Because you're not at peace and you're not about good will are you? At the base of it, in our own natural self, we are very selfish. God says, "I have come so that you not only can know my forgiveness and my peace and good will with Me, but that you can have it with other people."

If they don't accept it, you don't force it, but you give love. That's what God does with salvation. He says, "If you don't want it, that's your choice, but I'm right here to give it, if you'll receive it."

I was reading this past week of a book about a business man who was talking about on Secretary's Day. On Secretary's Day he bought his secretary a bouquet of flowers and they were just lovely and beautiful and she was all excited about them because he remembered that it was Secretary's Day and it wasn't overlooked. She remarked to him how beautiful these flowers were, this bouquet of flowers, and she said, "You know what, they have no fragrance. They have no fragrance." He said, "So I began to explain to her that these flowers were grown in a hot house." Because these flowers were grown in a hot house and passed on down that way, however those guys (horticulturists) do that kind of thing, because they were grown in the hot house there's no need for the pollination and there is no attraction to bugs. There are no bugs there. Because of that, the flowers stay beautiful but they have no need for an aroma because they'd been isolated. He wanted to explain to her the same thing with fruit that's grown in a hot house, something like that. It's just not as tasty as it is outdoors where it's pollinated in the natural process.

Here is the application. Some of us like gathering together in our own little warm places, call them a "hot house" if you will. We get in the hot house to come into this room and we like being with people here and we love singing the songs and hearing the message, we enjoy that. Matter of fact, once again I joked with those in the first service, that I will begin to learn whether you are at service or not basically because of where you sit, you basically sit in the same place. Now, some of you moved a little today. I know some of you moved on me; you are trying to fool me. The majority of you will begin to sit in the same place and then when we have one service, like we will next Sunday, there is going to be come confrontation. "Whose seat is this?" Hopefully, grace will abound. Don't start any fist fights at church.

The idea is that we like getting in cozy places and we like going to family meetings where everybody gets along, we love all that. The problem is, when you begin to do that and you begin to keep those people out who bug you, you lose your aroma. You lose your fragrance.

The world can't smell the aroma of Christ on us anymore because we have assembled ourselves in such ways and such little pockets of people, that we just hang out with Christians and we are not around non-Christians and we don't really like hanging around non-Christians. They say things that just really make us cower and they say things that just really are off color sometimes. We just want to stay away from those people. The Bible says you are the billboard, just like in Pitman, New Jersey.

Keeping Christ in Christmas. Not in a vigilantly way, but in a loving way, because that's how you keep your aroma. That's how they notice there's something different about you. That's how, whenever you come into a room, they get quiet. Don't take pride in that. Just know that they are smelling your aroma. It's the aroma of Christ, that's what we are about.

Why do we *keep Christ in Christmas*? Because of relationships. First, with God and, then, with each other because of forgiveness. It reminds me, it helps me release my fears. I don't have to be afraid. What am I to fear? *"If God is for me, who can be against me?" (Romans 8:31)* What are you afraid of?

When we come to this time right now, in this altar call time, go back and revisit these things. The Holy Spirit has been speaking to you. Maybe for you today it is about a fear. You are saying, "You know what? I really am afraid of how my kids are going to turn out. I'm really afraid of how my job is going to hang on. I'm really afraid of this, I'm really afraid of that." You just say, "You know Lord, I believe You love me and I am going to faith my way through that through Your power. I'm going to focus on You."

Some of its relational. You had a falling out with someone this past year. Now the year is coming to an end, what are you going to do about it? What will you do? You say, "Well, it's up to them. They need to come to me." That's not what Scripture says. Scripture says, "If you know your brother sinned against you, you go to them." If you know that they are offended by you and maybe they are totally wrong by being offended. Maybe they got it all wrong and all messed up, but how are they going to know unless you go to them in the love of Christ? Not in arrogance, but as a servant saying, "You know what, let's reason together. We are both Christians. Let's find out. Let's talk this out."

It takes courage. Where are you going to get that courage? Christ. You won't muster it in and of your own, so somewhere along the way as the Spirit as been speaking to you He's asking for a response from you. Brother Shane is going to come to the piano. As we begin with this altar call, just bow your head and close your eyes; just consider what we've talked about together.

Keeping Christ in Christmas is more than just a slogan. It's more than just a sign hung across the street. It's a reality that we believers, if you're a believer, that we believers hold to because it brings us comfort, it brings us hope, it is the greatest gift of all – Christ our Lord.

"Father, as we come before You, we bow because all glory is Yours. We thank You for speaking to our hearts, bringing into remembrance the great gift that is Jesus, that You came. Lord, help us to not be belligerent.

Lord, help us to be loving as we are the billboards of telling other people about why it is significant that the good news has come; about how you can have faith over fear, and we can have a relationship with You and a relationship with others.

Lord, You've convicted of us that we've blown it in a few ways and You've convicted us, God, that maybe our faith isn't where it needs to be. Whatever it may be, Lord, we just bow before You right now as a congregation saying, 'Jesus, be Lord.'

You have brought us the good news of great joy that is for all people. The people in this room right now say, 'Come, Jesus, minister to us. Find us faithful.'

And Lord, whatever response that You muster out of us, Lord, that we do by volition, free live our own choosing, we turn to You now, and ask that You be glorified.

It's in Your Holy name I pray, Amen."

If God spoke to you in that moment, you have a responsibility in how you respond to that; how you leave different then how you came in; how you understand Christmas a little better. The focus has been refined, the image is a little sharper in your life. Would you just give Him that honor and glory today?

Maybe God's not asking you to step out. I think it's a wonderful thing when you feel the unction and the move of the Spirit saying, "You know what, you just need to go down those steps and pray in a public way." Sometimes God has you do that just to encourage someone else who is struggling. You say, "Ah, that doesn't make any sense. I can do it right here in the pew." You can, but you can't if God says you need to step out.

So, if God is calling you to step out, step out. Not just to please the pastor, that's not my job, it's not your job; our job is to please Christ. It is however He leads you. Very simply, you'll respond this morning. When you do, you're *keeping Christ in Christmas*.