

Head of Christiana Presbyterian Church

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Newark, Delaware

“Don’t Miss the Messiah”

Isaiah 43:13-23

Matthew 2:13-23

Many of you know that before Pat and I retired and moved back to Delaware, we had worked for 17 years for the Buckhorn Children’s Center -- a Presbyterian-sponsored residential treatment program for neglected and abused children and youth in Kentucky. My mission was to develop a satellite residential treatment center in Ohio. Pat was campus nurse.

**One particular Christmas season I will never forget –
It was back in 2002.**

A week before Christmas, Claire, one of our Buckhorn girls said to the other children and staff in her cottage,

“We can’t turn away a pregnant girl at Christmas!”

Here is the situation the girls were discussing with the campus Director.

We had been asked to welcome an 18-year-old girl ...
She was Pregnant.

Her reported behaviors were so bizarre that **there was no place else in Ohio for her to go where she would be kept safe and helped through pregnancy.**

No program – no other agency – no family would have her.

So they turned-to Buckhorn Children’s Center ...

And Buckhorn worked out an arrangement –
we found an apartment in a nearby small town and Buckhorn would provide supervision and special supportive assistance –
**We would walk with her through pregnancy –
and beyond.**

One problem, however -- the apartment would not be available until mid-January.

So the question was, “Where will this pregnant teen live up until the time she moves into her apartment?”

So the Campus director talked with our girls. Their Buckhorn cottage was full.

One of our Buckhorn girls said, “She needs a family for Christmas. Another chimed-in, “Everyone needs a family for Christmas.”

One girl suggested, “We can give-up the activity room for a bedroom.

I’ll give her my dresser, she added.

Mr. Bob, one asked, can’t you find an extra bed?

All agreed that they would double-up on chores – and be on their better behaviors so the cottage staff could give extra attention to the new girl and help her get settled.

And so the conversation with the girls continued. “You would sacrifice your activity room?” the Director asked.

Then Claire spoke softly – and all conversation stopped –

“We can’t turn away a pregnant girl at Christmas!”

THAT SEALED IT. Two days later Gloria arrived at Buckhorn Children’s Center of Ohio. Accompanied by two deputy sheriffs and her case worker.

Her case worker brought a stack of files detailing terrible abuse – suffered within her family – from people a child should be able to trust.

The files also detailed Gloria’s response: Withdrawal – and angry/belligerent/destructive behaviors -- failed placements with foster families and residential treatment centers – and time languishing in psychiatric hospitals.

She had been on several different medications to control her behavior but with pregnancy the doctor had weaned her from those and her difficult behaviors escalated.

**So Gloria became a full-fledged member of the
Buckhorn family.**

**Why? Because you can't turn away a pregnant girl
at Christmas!
(At Christmas – or anytime)**

WHY?

Because we just might miss the Messiah!

It's a struggle, isn't it. Keeping up with new opportunities and surprises.
God is the expert at pulling surprises... and opening new doors.

“God is doing new things,” the Prophet Isaiah proclaims.

“Look, A road in the wilderness. Rivers in the desert.”

But even more astounding than new roads and fresh rivers is -

a young woman from Nazareth betrothed to a carpenter

– a simple manger –

-- A child wrapped in bands of cloth

Adoring shepherds --

-- And gift-bearing Magi.

And it's not simply surprises and new opportunities....

It's the invitation to see things with new eyes...with fresh vision.

It's an invitation that invites us to A REVITALIZED MISSION.

But be on guard – Don't miss the Messiah!

As I understand it –on one hand – a pregnant girl is welcomed –
courageously -- graciously, creatively ---

...or, on the other hand, she's sent packing on her way.

No room in our lives. Lives too hemmed-in by fear.

Bound by unbending principles – Rigidity ...

Principles parade in – while hurting/hoping people
are squeezed-out --

Dejected...lonely. Failed again. No Hope Here!

But again, be on guard – Don't miss the Messiah.

How about that the year 2016 – be, for Head of Christiana Presbyterian Church, the year we actively surprise others – and surprise ourselves by reaching-out in new and special ways to embrace a broadening band of people.

...And let us call them friends.

I'm talking about GRAND HOSPITALITY!

Dr. Phil – faced by parents fed-up with their teenage son – listens to their litany of complaints, and they finally blurt, “We can't do anything with him. “Tell us, what can we do?”

And Dr. Phil asks, “When did you tell him you love him?”

Let us give Love!

Let me assure you, love-filled, courageous people of God do not miss the Messiah!

In fact, the Messiah lives through the faithful people of HEAD OF CHRISTIANA.

The Messiah is present to others IN you and THROUGH you.

YOU, radiating gracious, infectious love, are indeed the body of Christ.
Christ alive in the world today.

So love extends – through our grand HEAD OF CHRISTIANA Presbyterian family.

So we welcome All -- youth - children - adults --

Those near-at-hand –

And those at a distance.

So we enfold those working in boring, seemingly meaningless jobs.

And we embrace those between jobs, the retired,
the worn-out.

The University-committed and the universe bound.

The up-and-comers -- and those who came and went.

ALL THE CHILDREN – ALL THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD!

ALL ARE OURS –

So we bind-up the wounds of the broken hearted.

**We heal bodies and minds –
 We rejoice with those who rejoice -- and we mourn with those who
 mourn.
 We work for justice –
 Creating shalom –
 We name the contemporary Herods –
 and by the power of God, who works through courageous
 people -- we wrest control so that a growing number of
 God's people may live in harmony.**

**AND LIVES ARE BEING CHANGED –
 -- FOR GOOD –**

**THROUGH THAT SAME LOVE –
 ...THE LOVE OF THE MESSIAH ALIVE THROUGH US.
 Alive through the church – The Body of the Messiah.**

THE MESSIAH.

DON'T MISS THE MESSIAH!

**Oh -- Remember Gloria who came to Buckhorn. Shortly after she
 arrived we learned that she was Jewish. That was yet another surprise.**

**In a couple of months she moved into her apartment. Buckhorn
 supported her. She had her baby. Buckhorn walked with her to help
 her make it with her baby...now a teenager.**

And Gloria? – She graduated from college.

But don't be surprised.

Be alert for miracles of grace. That is clearly God's business.

Love, so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

Amen.

