

Peter Wiley
 Christmas Eve 4, 6:00, 8:30 & 10
 Hudson
 12-24-07

Welcome my friends into the night of nights. It's pretty amazing, isn't it? No other night compares to this one. Did you know that more people come to church on Christmas Eve than any other time? We double the number of services and still have parking and seating issues.

And while that's a good problem to have . . . I am sorry for any challenges anyone has had. We are truly glad you are here and want you to know that you are *always, ALWAYS*, welcome here.

On this night of the birth of the homeless babe of Bethlehem --
 A home for each one and for all.

And for those who may feel a little tense this evening . . .

- Filled with the stresses of the season.
- Shopping not complete and now it's too late.
- Family and friends we may love but sometimes push us to the edge.
- And even just trying to get to church tonight and battling for a parking spot.

And then something amazing happened . . . didn't it? As soon as we started singing, *O Come All Ye Faithful*, that stress started to melt away. And in the music and in the readings we're brought into the wonder of the moment. There is something truly amazing about Christmas. At Christmas we hear from people we haven't heard from since . . . well, last Christmas.

My favorite Christmas card this year came from – of all people – an old Jewish friend who runs an ad agency in Denver.

It's a photo card with my friend, Ed, and his two boys and his wife. You know what photo cards are like. Sometimes you wonder if they only took one snap shot. Surely they must have a better picture than the one they sent. My friend Ed's made them all look good. There's my friend Ed in holey blue jeans, a beat-up sweatshirt and ski cap (I could forgive that one seeing that he lives in Denver. He's unshaven, slouching on the couch. His youngest son sits next to him. Red-faced with tears streaming down his face from screaming. Clearly he doesn't want to be there. His older son stands behind him making gestures that shouldn't be in a Christmas picture. And then . . . to his left is his wife Tracey. Poised perfectly, dressed just right with a great smile and looking stunningly beautiful.

Open the card and the caption reads:

From the one who wanted a Christmas picture and the three who didn't!

For me . . . that sums up a lot of Christmas. There are a whole lot of different wishes . . .
 and yet a lot of them don't agree with each other.

I wonder, what do you want for Christmas this year?
 If you had one and only one wish, what would it be?
 I asked about 150 people around the church what they wanted.
 Not everyone responded . . . but a lot did and they had some great answers.

A lot of people started with the traditional wishes for things like:

- World Peace & the end of war in the Middle East
- Safe travel
- A simpler life with less stuff

Or there was one that took the traditional and balanced it with her reality saying I wish for:
 Peace, joy . . . and a magic bullet smoothie maker

- a yogurt maker and Ugg boots
- A new food processor (mine's on the blink)
- A book and time to read it
- A new Dell lap top XPS M1730 with a Dual GeForce Video Card
- A warm blanket for my bed
- A greenhouse (can that fit in Santa's bag?)
- Non holiday-ish potholders and a small espresso maker
- A calorie free donut

And the one that really hurt and pulled at the heart . . .

- A playoff spot for the Cleveland Browns

And there were the touching and personal wishes:

- ~ Someone to share my life with
- ~ An end to family strife
- ~ Strength and courage
- ~ Children to find fulfillment in life
- ~ Health for ailing family members
- ~ And especially wishes for some of our own

Or my favorite:

I have everything I really want . . . what's to wish for???

A fitting thing to remember on this night that we celebrate the birth of the baby who had no home. It's the simplest and yet most amazing gift.

Tonight, we celebrate the birth of a baby into our lives – the babe of Bethlehem – Emmanuel – God in the embrace of our arms. A night like that (the birth of a baby), is a night that changes everything. A night like that is just plain amazing.

What do I want for Christmas this year?

I want that glimmer of light.

I want further signs of the wonder of the gifts of God.

Christmas is about light shining in darkness.

And Christmas says we can be that glimmer of light for each other.

There are few symbols of faith more powerful than a candle burning in the midst of darkness.

Bring a little more blackness into the night and it changes nothing.

Bring just a single candle and the light can fill the room.

Bring a single candle into the most sorrowful moment and there is hope.

That's what Christmas is all about. The world was in darkness. And then the babe of Bethlehem was born in a shack out back. Just a little baby. Just a little light.

But that little light was an unquenchable flame. It was a fire that caught in the wind spread to every corner of the world.

That's pretty amazing. Just a little light that couldn't be put out by the greatest powers of the world. Ever since that day, nations have come and gone. But the light still shines.

Just one little light taking hold of each of us.

That's my Christmas wish.

That the light of the child of Bethlehem takes hold in our hearts.

That Christmas is born in each of us.

Merry Christmas