

## **Did you have a “STABLE” Christmas?**

Dear Friends in Christ:

It's good to see you today and I pray that you and your family had a very blessed and Merry Christmas. It is, after all, as the song goes, a “*season*” that is meant “*to be jolly!*”

Yet, you know, and I know that, in reality lots of people are anything but “*jolly*” before Christmas, during Christmas and after Christmas. Some friends of ours just shared with us the other night that their church even held a “*Blue*” Christmas Service a few weeks ago, acknowledging how difficult the season can be for so people who are saddened, depressed and feeling so alone because someone they loved is no longer with them. It too is a song of the season, “*I'll have a blue Christmas without you.*”

Dr. Jerry Kieschnick, the former President of our national church body, wrote in his blog last week why Christmas can be such a tough season. Here are a few of his thoughts:

- 1. Christmas preparations have so many moving parts. Getting everything done creates tension.*
- 2. Christmas presents can be quite costly. Charging purchases is easy. Then the bill arrives.*
- 3. Christmas gatherings can be stressful. Family members and friends don't always play well together.*
- 4. Christmas interrupts the routine. People who normally go to school or to work are likely to be home, at the same time, for several days. That can be wonderful. Or not.*
- 5. Christmas reminds us of our childhood. If it was happy, memories are sweet. If it wasn't, memories may likely be painful.*

6. *Christmas for folks who are single, aged, in nursing homes, estranged, widowed or divorced is often spent alone. Being jolly is generally a team sport.*
7. *Christmas is hard for families who have experienced the loss of a loved one. Grief is neither quickly nor easily overcome.*
8. *Christmas exacerbates concern for the future, especially for those facing illness, surgery or other on-going health issues; for those encountering emotional turmoil, family conflict or financial challenge.*

*(Adapted from the blog Perspectives, Thoughts from Dr. Jerry Kieschnick, <https://jerrykieschnick.wordpress.com/2015/12/17/tis-the-season>)*

I certainly don't want to be a "*bah humbug*" preacher on this Sunday after Christmas, but my guess is that each of us, at some time in our lives, perhaps even this Christmas, can relate to some of those realities which make it hard to be "*jolly*?"

That's why the question posed in today's sermon is: **"Did you have a STABLE Christmas?"** The thought comes from a Christmas card I have saved for many years, received during a time of turmoil and stress in our land, just a few months after the terrorist attacks of 9/11/2001. Having just visited New York City a few weeks ago and seeing the reflecting pools and being humbled by the tour of the 9/11 museum, the card popped up in my memory bank, the question so relevant to life today: ***Did you have a STABLE Christmas?***

The play, you see, is on the word "*stable*!" The Christmas image of a "*stable*" is so cute, isn't it, as children dress up in costumes for their pageants, and "*live*" nativities try to recreate the scene. How many Christmas cards did you receive this year that depicted some form of the manger, Mary and Joseph and the Baby Jesus at the "*stable*?" You can see it right out in Hope's circle when you leave this morning, a "*stable*," a visual reminder of very important question: ***"Did you have a STABLE Christmas?"***

I ask it because we all need a little more “*stability*” in our lives, don’t we? The reality of terror that yet strikes our land and world, refugee families fleeing for a better life, nations and politicians so at odds over solutions that we end up with less unity, paltry justice and more divisiveness? Don’t we all need a little more “*stability*,” given how sickness and death can invade the family circle, changing life in an instant? Don’t we all need a little more “*stability*,” given how sin keeps rearing its ugly head, causing conflict at home, unstable marriages, bad choices and shaky relationships. Don’t we all need a little more “*stability*,” given all the change that swirls around us daily - at work, at school, at home, and even in the church? **We all need a STABLE Christmas!**

But we don’t receive it, my friends, through presents under a tree, a rebound in the stock markets, lower gas prices, or even an “*awakening of the force!*” We can’t buy “*stability*” or guarantee a life with no failures, breakdowns or repairs - and despite all our best efforts to combat disease and discover life-saving cures, there’s no pill yet found, no utopian ideal discovered, and no peace treaty that eradicates the effect of sin and death and terror and evil in this world! Life is not always smooth and comfortable and jolly, the darkness ever intruding into the light, and that my friends is why God came down at Christmas - into this world - in the person of His Son, Jesus the Christ, born in a “**STABLE**” – for you and me!

Here’s where “*stability*” comes from for me – simple faith and trust in Christ to be with me, to see me through, no matter what is happening to me or around me! I believe, as I pray you do, that “*the hopes and fears of all the years*” are met in this Child named Jesus, born in a “*stable*.” The “*rugged crude manger*” is but a foreshadowing of the “*old rugged cross*” where the Savior dies to forgive our sins and promises

everlasting life to all who believe! In the most “*unstable*” times of our walk in this world, God promises in Christ “*strength equal to the struggle, grace greater than our weakness,*” (2 Corinthians 12:9) and “*hope which does not disappoint!*” (Romans 5:5) Jesus Christ, the Son of God, born in a “*stable*” is the “*Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace!*” (Isaiah 9:6)

Dr. Kieschnick puts all of this in perspective when he blogs in a follow-up article on “*Reasons to be Joyful at Christmas.*” These two captured my heart:

- *Thanking God for peace in the midst of pandemonium, tranquility in a season of terror, freedom in the face of oppression, light in the darkness, forgiveness in a manger in Bethlehem!*
- *Knowing that a thousand times in history a baby has become a king but only once in history did a King become a baby!*

Like Simeon in today’s Gospel may we “*depart in peace, having seen the Christ Child, the salvation of God prepared in the presence of all the peoples,*” – including us! (Luke 2:29-31) What a Christmas this could be if we just went to the “**stable**” one more time!

God bless you! Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.  
**AMEN.**