

*December 24, 2015*

*“Hope Is Born”*

*Christmas Eve*

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Everybody needs hope. Everybody needs hope in their heart and soul. Everybody needs hope, to carry them through the dismal days and nasty nights of sickness, suffering, strife, and sadness. Without hope, we get lost. Without hope, the darkness swallows us up. Without hope, the world wins, and we lose.

And I don't want to focus any longer on the negatives, on this Christmas Eve. So let me just ask you this. We all recognize that there's a ton of bad news out there in the world, right? We all know that there are many things to fear and to worry about in this life, right? So we all need hope, don't we? Everyone needs hope in their life.

I don't know about you, but I have a lot of hope in my life. First of all, my wife Colleen and I have a dog named Hope. Hope is our beautiful six-year-old lab. Every day I take Hope outside. Every day Hope helps me get the paper. Every day Hope does an excellent job of reminding me multiple times to feed her. Every day Hope wants to be petted, and played with, and petted, and played with. Hope, my dog, is a big part of my life at home.

And I work here at our church called Hope. So my paycheck says Hope on it. I have stationery and business cards that say Hope. I own several T-shirts that with the name Hope on them, and an old hat. We have a Hope ornament on our Christmas tree, and a Hope calendar with two wacky pastors hanging on our wall. So I have plenty of Hope in my life! How about you?

I am truly thankful for my dog, Hope, and for my church, Hope. But I am deeply, profoundly thankful for the hope I find every year in the Christmas story.

Now, I love the Christmas season! It's crazy busy, and it's getting more and more chaotic every year; but I love everything about Christmas. The music, the lights, the decorations, the festivities, Pastor Lew's plaid Christmas suit, all of it. But, most of all, I love the Christmas story, and the hope that fills up my heart and soul every year when I read that story.

Now, some of you Bible scholars out there realize that the word "hope" is not found in the Christmas story at all. I've read Saint Luke's beautiful account of the Lord's birth many times. I've read it in several different English versions: the King James version, the New King James Version, the Revised Standard Version, the Contemporary English Version, the New International Version, and pretty much every other English version of the Bible. I've even read the Christmas story in the original Greek language in which Saint Luke penned it. And the word "hope" isn't found in the Christmas story in any of them.

But the Christmas story is filled with hope, nonetheless. Mary hears the news that she is going to have a miracle baby, and she puts her trust and hope in God's awesome power. Joseph is told, "Go ahead and marry Mary, even though she's pregnant with a child that's not yours" – and he does, letting his faith and hope in God's Word prevail. Shepherds hear the news, and they run to the manger, bubbling over with eager hope and joy. Wise Men follow the star, hoping that their Savior, the king of the Jews and the king of all the world, is waiting for them in that sleepy little town of Bethlehem.

And then there's Baby Jesus, asleep in the manger. No room in the inn. No crib for his bed. Just as humble and lowly as any human baby could ever be. But this baby is God's Son. This infant is God's solution to the age-old problem of human sin. This sweet little child is the One who will one day give his perfect, holy life as a sacrifice for my wretched sins and yours. This precious Babe of Bethlehem is my Redeemer and Deliverer, the Light of my life, the Savior of your soul and mine, the One who makes us right with God, the Giver of hope.

See, hope is not something that can be bought on Black Friday or Cyber Monday. Hope is born! Hope isn't something that you can gift-wrap, or tuck under a Christmas tree. No, hope is born in Jesus Christ. And in the blessed Christmas story, friends, year after year, I find the hope I need. I find all the hope I need in Jesus.

Yesterday I visited one of the kids from our church at Duke Children's Hospital. She's plenty brave and tough; but she's having a pretty rough time, and it's hard for a little child to be in the hospital. I took along a children's Bible, and I read the Christmas story with her. We looked at the pictures together, and we talked about Mary, Joseph, the angels, shepherds, Wise Men ... and Baby Jesus.

And I know Jesus is there in that hospital room. Christ came into our world on the first Christmas, and he didn't have a room reserved in a palace, or a five-star hotel. Jesus came into one of those dark, dismal places where we all end up once in a while. The Holy Family knew suffering, just like we all know suffering sometimes. And all his life, the Lord Jesus walked among the hurting, the sick, the downtrodden, and the misfits of humanity, bringing them hope.

So the story of Christmas brings hope to a little girl in a hospital bed tonight. The story of Christ's birth brings hope to

me, in a joyful way, year after year. And the story of Christmas can fill your heart and soul with hope, too. Because in Christ, you know that God cares for you and loves you. In that little baby Jesus, God is sharing all your troubles, trials, and temptations. In the story of Jesus' birth, God is bringing you tonight what all of us need every day. Everybody needs hope. And, in Jesus, we have hope! Amen.