

**Registering the New Family of God**  
**based on Luke 2:1-20 and Matthew 1:18-25, David Jahnke, 12/24/15**

So I went to the New Star Wars movie with my sons and a few of their friends on Monday. It hit me how cool it will be to always have this memory. I was all in for this one, even splurging on \$20 in snacks for them.

I think tonight is about how God is all in for all of humanity. It's about His creating a crystal-clear memory of joy, love and peace for his children. Just as the boys and I are going to be able to say, "Remember going to see The Force Awakens" and smile and talk about it, tonight our Father gathers us in to see His Force Awaken and smile and talk to and through us about it with family and friends.

Now there is a point in the movie where a new character named Rey tells Han Solo that there are stories about what happened. And Han tells her, "the weird thing is...it's all true, all of it. The Dark side. The Jedi. They're real."

C.S. Lewis wrote, "Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, is of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important."

I do not think there is really any way for me or anyone else or even you to convince yourself of the truth of Christianity. I think it only comes by way of the revelation of God. That is how Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and wise men all came to know the truth about the most important things.

I can testify about my leap of faith and how this leap led to my being caught up in the arms of God's love. And how time and again the truth of the gospel has been wondrously confirmed in my lie. I can reason with you and point to the fruits of believing but only the Spirit of God coming to your heart and mind...can teach you the truth of Christianity.

I can assure you of this, however. Tonight God entered the darkness and uncertainty of this world and shined eternal light on it. So the Spirit will reveal himself to you in God's good time. And you want to prepare yourself for that meeting. And you do this through believing in and following the guiding lights of love and mercy.

On this night, we remember Mary and Joseph and all Israel having to register their families in their hometown. A Gentile emperor led Joseph and his family back to Bethlehem so that the Messiah would be born where scripture said he would be. "Even Emperor Augustus obeys God," said Joseph said in the movie we are watching in small groups.

What a poignant beginning to the gospel. The Roman emperor—the leader of the oppressors of God—played a critical role in the birth of Jesus. This is first of many surprises, all according to God’s providence. 1. The King of kings being born in a lowly stable. 2. The bread of life, Jesus, placed in a feeding trough. 3. Lowly shepherds, generally thought untrustworthy, being the first to worship Jesus. 4. Wise men from other nations and religions come to honor Jesus.

The rich and poor, wise and simple, Jew and Gentile all join the new human and his family. There is only one human family. And we all become one through accepting the scandalous love and mercy of Christmas.

I saw a couple of sports documentaries that speak to this. One was about the Bad Boys of basketball—the Detroit Pistons of the 1980s. There was the wonderful contrast between the players: Dennis Rodman and Isiah Thomas who both grew up very poor and with family problems and Bill Laimbeer whose father was the CEO of a large Chicago corporation. They were all hated by the basketball world for the way they played—they were cheap and even hurtful. But they had this tremendous love for each other and spoke of each other as family. And they stuck with each other through thick and thin. And they won two championships in a row, defeating Larry Bird, Magic Johnson and Michael Jordan.

Even more poignant was the story of the hapless Buffalo Bills who lost four Super Bowls in a row. In the first loss, the kicker Scott Norwood missed a last second field goal in Tampa Bay that would have won them the game. Imagine how heart-wrenching that would be! But when they got back to wintry Buffalo, the city welcomed them back with tremendous Fanfare and cheer at a rally. And about half-way through, a chant rumbled up from the crowd, “We want Scott! We want Scott! We want Scott!” So the field goal kicker came forward and gave a great speech. The next year, he did not miss a single field goal in the playoffs.

So a lot of people are like the Bills and a lot are like the Pistons. A lot of us play the game well and fair but never seem to get on top. Others do not play particularly well or by the rules and we may hurt people more than we should. Tonight tells us that we have a God and we have a family who will love us no matter what. Tonight God enters the mess of our personal lives and the mess of this world and says, “I have wed myself to you...and to you...and to you...And I will never ever let you go.”

I hope that you all have a family that loves and graces you like this and a church family which does the same. I know this one does a great job of it and I am so grateful. And then...when we know unconditional Love, then we can go about the business of God in the world.

I saw the people of God carrying out His business in wonderful, shocking ways this week. A Buddhist temple in Korea lit up their Christmas tree, children from the temple sang Christmas carols and the head of the temple proclaimed, "Let us celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, whose name is sacrifice and love. Let us treat our parents, siblings and neighbors like our Buddha and let us live like Jesus, caring for others' pain and suffering." Modern day wise men from the east honoring the birth of Jesus.

Closer to home, our community went about the peace-making of God on Tuesday night. Around 200 Christians, Jews, Muslims and humanists gathered at the Scotch Plains Town Hall and proclaimed peace and love and respect among all the peoples of our nation. It was my first time demonstrating and holding up signs and boy did it feel good. When I finished making my sign, I went straight to the street to show it to all the cars driving by. Others followed suit and then I realized that no one was across the street to catch traffic coming the other way. And I went over there. Everyone was curious and there lots of smiles and honking of horns. Two teenagers came and asked me what was going on and said how cool it was. A woman rolled down her window and asked me and smiled from ear to ear. Mormon missionaries heard from their downtown apartment and came and asked and went over and checked it out.

And at the end of the night, I was deeply moved by a sign held by a man of middle-eastern descent. It said, "I am a Muslim and I love Jesus."

Friends, God's love and mercy are being powerfully revealed in our age. This is happening in surprising, even scandalous ways, at least according to what the institutional church is used to. But considering the scandalous circumstances of our Savior's birth and life and death, we should not be too surprised. Our peaceful shepherd is gathering in His flock from all the corners of the globe. I charge you to join His wonderful work and find the peace, meaning and joy for which you were created. To the God of all grace who calls us to eternal union with Christ Jesus, be all the power and the glory now and forevermore. Amen