

Signs: A Christmas Tree – Matthew 1:18-25

We conclude our Advent journey today as we have been reading the signs of Advent. We have looked at the many prophetic signs given to Israel and us in the Old Testament. We heard some warning signs as we looked at the message of John the Baptist, exhorting us to repent and change our behavior. Last week we asked the question of John the Baptist while he sat in prison, “Is Jesus the One?” Today, we look to the signs that are all around us this time of year.

People all around us are busy preparing for Christmas. It may have become a secular holiday to most, rather than a holy day... but God can use the signs of the season to help us point people to Jesus.

The signs of Christmas are all around. The shopping malls are full. Your neighborhood has homes decorated with lights, Santa’s and Reindeer, snow men and maybe a manger scene. Some cities decorate their light poles to look like giant candy canes.

I read an article a few years ago that Christmas trees were hard to find in Germany. Why? Because German Christmas tree farms, despite having a bumper crop of trees that year, were sending countless shipments of refrigerated cargo containers full of Christmas trees to China. Why was that? Well, the buying and decorating of a Christmas tree in China had become the new sign of economic prosperity.

Germany is credited with starting the Christmas tree tradition as we now know it in the 16th century when devout Christians brought decorated **trees** into their homes. The Christmas evergreen trees became symbol for eternal life, because they always stay green. Isn’t it wonderful to see the signs of Christmas spreading across the globe, even in places like China?

Yes, I realize the Christmas tree boom in China does sound the message of commercialism rather than a sign of the “reason for the season.” It would be easy to complain about the commercialization of Christmas with all the secular trimmings. But, all these signs of the season, including the secular ones can be helpful for us as Christians for many of the signs of the season point to Jesus and His birth:

Wreath – most wreathes are evergreen which symbolizes eternal life and they’re always round to represent that God has no beginning or ending.

Star – a star directed the Wisemen where to find the baby Jesus.

Angels – the angels that announced Jesus’ birth.

Lights – to remind us that Jesus is the Light of the World.

Colors of Christmas – red and green

Red for the blood Jesus shed for us.

Green to represent the eternal life that He offers us.

Nativity Set – depicts the real Christmas and helps us remember that Christ came for us personally.

Candy Cane – Indiana candymaker wanted to make a candy that was a witness to Christ. The **J** shape to represent the precious name of Jesus, who came to earth as our Savior. Started with a stick of pure white, hard candy – symbolizes virgin birth and sinless nature of Jesus. 3 small red stripes – the scourging Jesus by which we are healed. The large red stripe – the blood shed by Christ on the cross so that we could have the promises of eternal life.

Did you hear what I did there with the description and symbolism of items you can buy at Target, Wal-Mart or Menards? I gave a witness to the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Back to the Christmas trees in China. Think about this for a moment. In a country like China, where Christianity is not welcomed and Christians are persecuted, you find a symbol of Christmas. You have financially successful people buying Christmas trees as the new status symbol of success.

Now if you are the “new rich” in China and you want to know about “Christmas Trees” and how to decorate one what do you do? Well, you get out your computer and you go to Wikipedia, the free dictionary on line, type “Christmas Tree” in on the “search” line and this is what you will read:

“A Christmas Tree. A Yule tree is one of the most popular traditions associated with the celebration of Christmas. It is normally an evergreen.” The very second word that is highlighted is the word Christmas. Well, if you just purchased your first Christmas tree as a sign of your new status, then you will want to know a little more about Christmas. As an interested educated seeker in China, you’ll want to know what Christmas means. When you click on the word Christmas this is what Wikipedia will tell you. “Christmas is an annual holiday that celebrates the birth of Jesus.”

So then, an inquisitive mind will click on “Jesus” where they’ll read, “Jesus of Nazareth is the central figure in Christianity.” The main source of information regarding Jesus’ life and teachings are the four gospels of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Other words will also be highlighted... John the Baptist, Jerusalem, crucified, Pontius Pilate, resurrected, God incarnate; are all highlighted.

American and European Christians who are residing in China as teachers or missionaries of business people, are using the signs and symbols of a secular celebration to many and pointing their Chinese associates or students to Christ. There will be those in China, who because of the purchase of a western symbol of success, a simple Christmas tree, will become Christians. The Holy Spirit will create the curiosity, and then call to faith the seeker who simply wanted a Christmas tree. Some will feel the tug of the Savior on their heart and believe.

So, where am I going with all of this: you can do this, too. You have people in your life who need to know the real reason for the season. So how can point people to Jesus this time of year?

Obviously, Christmas is here. Have you had any conversations with people about Christmas? You know how they go... “Got all your shopping done?” “Do you have your tree up?” “Got many parties to go to?” People will give you all kinds of answers. They don’t want to talk about the tree, or their shopping list. They want to talk about their frustrations, their busy and full days. What will you do with the conversation?

Listen. Then ask a question...”What does Christmas mean to you? Let them answer. Then respond, “Did you know Christmas was about Jesus?” Or use the visible symbols of Christmas to tell the birth of Jesus, His death and resurrection. See where the conversation goes.

If God can use a Christmas tree to draw a human heart to the truth of Christmas...the holy day we celebrate... he can use a simple conversation we have with somebody in our home, on the street or at work or school.

I can share many stories from all the places I’ve been, where a simple invitation....

Folks...it was a simple conversation, a simple invitation.

Use the signs of Christmas to enter into conversations, let the signs point people to Jesus.