



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau  
December 14, 2014

**"How to Feel Christmas" (A Sense of Christmas Series)**  
**The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun**

**M**att. 2:1 *In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,*

*Matt. 2:2 asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage."*

*Matt. 2:3 When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him;*

*Matt. 2:4 and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.*

*Matt. 2:5 They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:*

*Matt. 2:6 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"*

*Matt. 2:7 Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.*

*Matt. 2:8 Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."*

*Matt. 2:9 When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.*

*Matt. 2:10 When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.*

*Matt. 2:11 On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

*Matt. 2:12 And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.*

*Matt. 2:13 Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him."*

*Matt. 2:14 Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt,*

*Matt. 2:15 and remained there until the death of Herod.*

In our Advent sermon series called A Sense of Christmas, we have gone through the senses of hearing, smelling, and tasting. Today I am going to talk about How to FEEL Christmas.

In today's passage, we might have noticed that it said in verse 3 that King Herod was FRIGHTENED about the coming birth of Jesus. That's an interesting feeling. But it's a true feeling for many. Some are frightened about God or Jesus. They think God is out to get them.

That is why I like the sign posted as you exit the parking lot of a church in Redding, California that says: "God is in a good mood." That phrase catches you off guard, doesn't it? Is God in a good mood? Is He really in a good mood? If I blow it or if I sin, is He then going to be in a bad mood?

It is important to know that God is always in a good mood in the sense that He wants the best for us. And even when we mess up, He comes to guide us to a better way. His laws or commandments were always fences for our freedom to live life to the fullest. He always wants us to live life in joy.

King Herod, on the other hand, was frightened about Jesus because Herod saw Jesus as a threat to his power and popularity. It makes sense for King Herod to feel that way. We are all inclined to want to be in control or to have some kind of influence over things.

When we decide to follow Jesus, we give up power. We give up control of our lives. It means we submit to Him because He knows the best way to live.

It means we want to live by the Holy Spirit who can guide us supernaturally.

But to be frightened of Jesus? Herod didn't get it. The magi or the wise men got it. Jesus was special. Different. And we know Him today as the Son of God!

Historians believe that the wise men actually did not arrive to see Jesus in His house until many months after He was born, and not on the night of His birth, as Christmas stories and Christmas cards often depict. That was probably a good thing for Mother Mary who might not have been in the mood for visitors that night. And notice how it says in verse 11 that they met Jesus in a house, not in a stable.

Also I should mention that though Hallmark cards said there were three kings, the Bible did not say they were kings, but wise men or magi who studied the stars. We don't know either if there were 3 or 30 wise men who came. It's just that they brought at least three gifts, and the ones mentioned were gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And so people presumed there may have been three. And that's why today our nativity scenes have the symbolic three wise men.

It also means that Jesus wasn't raised as a poor boy. Having the gold gave Him a head start in His 509 college trust. Talk about a trust fund!

Yet, it is how we understand Christmas that might make it a frightening time for some of us. Our calendars can make us feel stressed, even though we are the ones who say yes to all sorts of Christmas events. Our year-end deadlines can make us anxious. Our financial pressures can make us feel troubled and stressed. We can dread Christmas and feel

burdened thinking about sending out Christmas cards, buying gifts, and attending company or other parties.

Here's the thing – many people are feeling burdened. Maybe it is a time to remember we are all in the same boat, a boat of many burdens, and maybe God is asking us to help lift the burdens of others. But we may be already so heavily laden that we say, "I don't have the time to help others."

I get that. But hear this. I don't think God wants to burden you more than you can bear. But sometimes we need to increase our feelings of sensitivity or empathy for others, especially during Christmas. Sometimes, sometimes God is whispering to you to help those who FEEL that Christmas or life is hard.

Today being White Gifts Sunday, we have an opportunity later in the service to give canned goods to the poor. That's neat. You heard God's whisper to help the poor today. And if you forgot, don't worry; God is in a good mood. He is happy that some, and if even one person, brought a canned good for the poor today.

But I believe, as we mature in our walk of following Jesus, then we not only become more sensitive to the feelings of others but that God even empowers us to help them. The trick is to try to see the "corners." What do I mean by that?

Let me tell you a story about my friend whom I shall call Ryan Hawkins. I have his permission to share his story but not his real name. One day, Ryan discovered he had a very rare malignant cancer that resulted in a tumor in his nose. He had what's called an olfactory neuroblastoma.

As Ryan tried to create a timeline in his mind of how he got cancer, and as he was trying to figure

out where to have surgery on the mainland, he decided to talk to a doctor and asked him, "How did I get this since I didn't have any symptoms?"

The doctor told him, "You probably had symptoms but you never made a connection."

Ryan was adamant when he told the doctor, "I had no symptoms!"

The physician replied, "Think back. You don't recall anything unusual or peculiar?"

"Oh," he said, "I had nose bleeds."

"How often?"

"Two or three times a month."

"Where?"

"The left side of my nose."

"Always the left side? When?"

"Transient. It would just appear."

The doc said, "Given that your tumor was on the left side of your nasal passage, you probably had early signs of your tumor. You had nose bleeds."

But Ryan said, "Everyone has nose bleeds."

The doctor responded, "But not always on the same side as frequent as yours and for no reason."

That is when he said, "Sometimes people treat nose bleeds like a CORNER of an X-ray."

"What?" asked Ryan

The physician said, "When I teach my residents, I always tell them when looking at x-rays to look at the full image and not only the center of x-rays. You have to look at all of the corners."

**S**ometimes there is something in the corner that helps you make a full diagnosis. A student can easily disregard a corner.

“That is just like you saying ‘Everyone has nose bleeds. What does that have to do with anything?’ But the nose bleeds may have been one of the early symptoms, but you weren’t looking at the corners.”

Then Ryan said, “I started thinking about how the corners of an x-ray apply to my life. How often in relationships I miss the corners.”

He said, “I remember when I was an English literature teacher 30 years ago I would start my class with journaling and I would typically write a topic on the blackboard and my students would write for 15 minutes on anything they wanted. But usually it was guided a bit like on what I was teaching during that time, like Shakespeare. And for that week it was anything you want to say about life and *The Merchant of Venice*.”

Ryan confessed, “I was really only interested in whether someone was getting MY teaching. Did they get MY LESSONS? That was the center. But it wasn’t the corners.

But quite often a student wouldn’t write anything and doodle instead and then way off in the CORNER of the page, a student would write, “Sorry, Mr. Hawkins. Not really interested in *Merchant of Venice*, or on the character Shylock. I have other things on my mind.”

Ryan told me, “When I read that the only thing that hit me was this person was NOT getting what I was teaching the class. It was really about me, and me only. I completely missed the corner of the “x-ray” (or what the students were talking about on the corner of the pages of their journals). I never asked what was

happening in their lives that were making it so hard for them to write.

“As I thought more about what the doctor said about looking at the corners, I remember once I was walking my dog in my neighborhood, and someone was weeding in her yard. As I walked by, I said, ‘Oh, weeds, nut grass.’

“And she responded, ‘Yeah, they just don’t go away. Like the problems in my life, they just keep coming back.’

“I remember again thinking about my first impression, ‘Well, this person doesn’t know what I know about nut-grass. You don’t whack at the top of the nut-grass. You have to go to the root or else it will come back.’

“But I missed the corner. She was saying something else. She was saying that she was having problems in her life and they kept coming back. And I did nothing in response.

“Maybe it was an opportunity to say a little prayer for her. Maybe it was an opportunity to find out what that people was really saying about himself or herself. She was telling me something, but I missed it because I was focusing on what I know about nut grass.”

Ryan then said to me, “I felt that I am a little better today in reading the corners of x-rays with my walk with Jesus being a bit closer. It’s more in step, more mature because He is the great physician, the great Healer. He teaches you to read the corners of x-rays.”

He said, “Jesus didn’t make me think of those incidents to make me feel bad but He wanted to show me a baseline to show me how much I have changed. Back then I wouldn’t even think about that woman and her problems. Today, maybe I would pray for her silently. Maybe some day, I

might even stop and ask her how is she doing?”

Ryan said, “When you accept Christ, He gives you gifts like grace, love, and forgiveness that allows you to do that with others.

“Hard to do but He enables you to do that along the way. He teaches you how to look at the corner of X-rays in relationships.”

That’s Ryan’s story. For our story this Christmas, we can be like a Herod and miss the whole point of who Jesus is. Herod felt frightened.

Or maybe the challenge for us all is to look at the corners, to hear how others are really feeling, to hear what they are really saying or writing and take them at face value and respond.

Many here today in the church and many outside the church are going through a tough time—cancer, financial concerns, issues of loss and overwhelming problems dealing with the nut grass of life. I agree with my friend Ryan, that as we mature in our walk with Jesus, He will give us the tools we need to listen and to help others. He gives us gifts of wisdom, discernment, helps, healing.

And as the Bible says, our lives can bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit that is offered to us all—the fruit of love, joy, peace patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

So this Christmas as for how you are feeling and how others are feeling, look for the corners and remember that Jesus said He is the Cornerstone of life, the foundation on which all good healthy life is built. We have hope today because Jesus looked at the corners and saw us all there and He came to earth.

**A**nd much of His life was being with the people of the corners, the so-called outsiders, the woman at the well, the adulterous woman, the embezzler named Zaccheus, the outspoken fisherman named Peter. And He is for us all, may we know that He is in our corner. He knows how we feel today. May we remember that Christmas means God is with us, and taught us and died for us and lives today that we might have life.

Amen? Amen?