

I Really Do LOVE to Tell This Story!

Congratulations to my IDC friends! You have the great privilege of conveying the wonderful Incarnation message this month!

This story will be told from our pulpits in Christmas messages, December series preaching, and (no doubt) many special presentations. There will be extra schedules (which means extra rehearsals and preparations) and a myriad of fellowship gatherings.

Charles Dickens' opening lines of "...*these are the best of times, these are the worst of times...*" no doubt apply. Never have we had greater opportunity, greater tools for communication, and greater needs to which we can bring a message of hope. We also face great opposition – there are fewer "automatic" deferences to the church (more than ever, we must *earn* the right to be heard), there is a wide menu of options that all seem to conflict with local church ministry, and a spiritual malaise has gripped our nation and even found its way into some of our pews.

What a great moment! We should consider ourselves in position like the shoe salesman sent to a tropical country. He wrote the main office, saying, "No one here wears shoes! Send more samples!"

I really do love to tell this story! I believe that preaching the Christmas story provides a great challenge (how do you tell a familiar story in a new way?) and special opportunity (you will have some of those "C & E" people show up...families will open special doors for you, and the festive spirit and special schedules often provide unique open doors to people's lives).

I really do love to tell this story! Maybe that is why, for the past 12 years serving in this assignment, I've had a bit of the "pastor's juices" flowing in December. Coleen and I have offered our services to our open churches to be a pastor at their Christmas events, assist their musical presentations, etc. I have even exercised my best Superintendent's authority by "inviting myself" to preach at some of these open churches during December....just to tell this story to a waiting audience again!

I really do love to tell this story! Preaching material is unlimited! You have kings and shepherds (all socio-economic strata visit the Christ-child), you have pathos and drama (a pregnant girl shamed in society, a wicked king with vengeance), and a myriad of special people who display God's plans and desires for our lives (Joseph, a man who believed God at great personal risk; Mary, preach about this young virgin in a religious community where she is either "adored or ignored," if you please; Simeon, a patient man whom God prepared for ONE moment in history; Wise Men who were "wise indeed" because they listened to the Holy Spirit to "go home by another route;"...and the list goes on). Not all "Christmas texts" are in Isaiah, Matthew, or Luke. The Incarnation Message is woven throughout Scripture. (I think I am attempting more than commentary here...Pastor, I am challenging you to preach a *fresh* Christmas story this year!)

I really do want God's Church to win big this Christmas! I exhort you, brothers and sisters, find your way to your knees in private moments...saturate your heart with His Word and His presence...and step to the pulpit, or youth service, or children's event with "great Good News" for a waiting world. You can do it! I know you (and God) can!

Oh yes, I almost forgot...I think my all-time favorite Christmas text is...

Galatians 4:4: *"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, {5} to redeem..."* (NIV)

"...but when the right time came..." (NLT)

"...but when the time arrived that was set by the Father..." (The Message)

"...but when the completion of time came..." (Holman)

"...but when the fullness of time was come..." (KJV)

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