

I think it was last year; when our Christmas Eve Service was over here at the church, we went home directly. As soon as we arrived, I remember, something was not right with my son. So I asked, "Son, what's the matter?" He said, "Dad, I don't feel like it is Christmas this year." He then said, "Well, this year, we do not have a Christmas tree at home; I don't have Christmas presents to open. It is not Christmas!" "Samuel, what do you mean? Didn't you already open them?" "Yes, but I still don't feel it, I wish we had a tree and had more presents underneath it."

It was quite heart-breaking to hear that on Christmas Eve. But I understood; it is not just kids; Christmas is the time for gifts and parties to people of all ages. Sure, why not?

It is one of the best seasons to celebrate across the world; while many people may not know what the real meaning of Christmas is, we Christians happily celebrate the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Why not? We are so happy that we exchange gifts, send cards, have parties etc. Why then another Christmas, especially in July? Isn't it weird?

But when I looked up some web sites on internet, I was very surprised that this is a very common phrase to many people.

It may have started as a marketing strategy from some business people. Just like everything else, businesses go slow during hot summer months with many people going away on vacation. So as a way of reaching out to those consumers, they put signs of "Christmas in July." It is an idea to get people's attention. In essence, however, they are trying to take more advantage of Christmas; they have great success during the Christmas holidays and they want to use Christ's name one more time for their businesses. It is just a gimmick. They just want us to buy stuff in the name of

Christmas. And it is just out of context.

But for us as a church, I think, it is very appropriate to celebrate the birth of Jesus more often, rather than just once a year! I think we need to do it every week.

In fact, worship is a celebration. When I went to Glide Memorial Church in May, they called it celebration. On that particular Sunday, their one hour forty minute service had only 13 minutes for preaching and the rest was singing and dancing; it was quite wild; there was no form of worship at all; they did not even have a bulletin in a traditional sense; a bunch of men and women were on the stage and sang over and over; and the spirit was good and the mood was that of celebration.

People from many backgrounds came and become a part of it; the philosophy/ theology is very simple; they said that people already have enough troubles, that people already have enough problems. So what the church can do is celebrate the love of God that is given to all of us through Jesus; so no matter who we are and no matter where we come from, God accepts us as we are and forgives our shortcomings through Jesus.

So just come and be part of this heavenly banquet. Jesus already took away our burdens of sin; what we need to do is celebrate his love and be thankful. Worship does not have to be a lecture; religion does not have to be a set of rules and rituals; it is about being part of the love and celebrating it.

Those who are hungry come, the Lord feed you.

Those who are thirsty come, the Lord quench you.

Those who are struggling come, the Lord give you a rest.

Those who are dead come, the Spirit of God make you live.

Those who are lost come, the Spirit of God guide you.  
Those who are in need come, God of creation provide you.  
And finally, those who are in darkness come, the Light of life  
shine upon you.

That is what the Gospel is about; that is what the Bible is  
about; that is what the texts for today are about.

John says that in Jesus "there was the true Light that  
enlightens every human being." But the world did not know  
Him and did not receive Him. The reason they did not  
receive Him was because the world was in darkness. The  
Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not  
comprehend it.

But those who receive Him are given a privilege to be called  
His sons and daughters. We can call God our Father; we are  
no longer slaves of sin but God's precious children who are  
free.

We can become free; we can become happy; we can become  
new beings; we can claim ourselves as new creatures; we are  
not what we were; once we come to Christ, we become new;  
we become people of hope; we become people of joy; we can  
become people of truth; we can become people of promise.

All this is possible because of the Light we have from Jesus,  
the Word Became Flesh, God-with-Us, and Immanuel.

All this is possible because the Spirit of God is with us and  
within us.

Something we have to know is that against God we are  
always wrong. That is, we must realize that we are always  
in sin; that we are always in darkness. Like it or not, that is

the reality. Our minds are always fragile; our thoughts are always changing each second; we are so weak to be taken over by the power of darkness.

So we come to the Light; we bring ourselves before the Light; we invite the Spirit to come and lead us in our ways. Otherwise, we fail; we stumble; we fall back; we do wrong.

So my invitation for all of you is to come to the Light. Let the Light shine upon you; let the Spirit of God cover you so that you walk in the light in every path you walk in your lives.

We need Christmas this July. In fact we need it more badly than ever. The world seems to be covered by more darkness than ever before; there is consumerism; there is materialism; there is capitalism; on top of all these, there is racism; there is all kind of "isms." These are all agents of darkness; they try to take us away; they try to get in our way day and night in our lives.

However, the Light liberates us from all these; The Light of life comes to us in our humble quite spirit to awaken and enliven us in this world; the whole point of Christmas is that God came down to get in our faces, and stake his claim to the world and our individual lives;

We need Jesus; we need the Light of life; we need the Spirit of God now and ever more; we need a real Christmas in this July.

Amen.