

EXPERIENCING CHRISTMAS IN AUGUST

Some of you might have wondered why I did not publish a mid-week message last week. Perhaps others of you who read this message regularly did not notice it at all. In case you are part of the group wondering why there was no message last week you will be happy to know I finally took a week of holidays. It was my first week of holidays since August of 2019. A pandemic has had something to do with a few missed weeks of holidays since then.

Due to all of the uncertainty with flying we decided to drive across the border into Michigan and spend the weekend in the Frankenmuth area. If you have ever visited this part of Michigan, chances are you have gone to the Bronner's Christmas Wonderland store in Frankenmuth. It is advertised as the largest Christmas store in the world. We spent a few hours there on Saturday.

When you walk into the store it is hard not to smile right away and feel the Christmas spirit. You are put into the spirit hearing your favorite Christmas songs playing over the store's speakers while you are shopping. Before you know it, you are singing or humming your favourite songs. Seeing display after display of Christmas decorations puts you into the spirit of wanting to add to your decorations around the house. There were so many decorations my family wanted to buy but when we looked at the price and factored in the exchange rate, my cheap spirit took over and put it back down instead of placing it in the cart.

The spirit of the season continues when you get to the section where they have all kinds of Christmas ornaments. It is so easy in this section to begin imagining your own tree at home and wondering if there is room for a few new ornaments. My daughter found two new ones she plans on adding to our tree this year.

At the back of this large store, the spirit of the season is found while gazing at and admiring all of their Christmas trees. It is wonderful to see them lit up and decorated. You also have to look up in each section of the store where you can see some of the best displays and decorations this store has to offer. Nadine and Coral took a lot of pictures of these beautiful displays.

It was so nice for two hours to get a taste of Christmas in August. My focus for those two hours was on good memories about Christmas, on songs I love to hear, on seeing smiles on people's faces, and of course on Jesus. For two hours I did not focus on my work, nor on the long list of things that were awaiting my attention once I returned from holidays. Experiencing Christmas in August was a much-needed gift and blessing.

As I returned to work on Monday and began contemplating my mid-week message, I could not help but think if we all need to experience a little Christmas right now in our lives. I know Christmas is still four months away. For the past eight months we have journeyed away from Christmas and resumed the realities that come with everyday life. Schedules, appointments, work, running errands, finding time to get together with family and friends, are all part of our everyday lives. Some of these everyday realities can deplete us physically, emotionally, and spiritually over time. Added to these everyday realities are challenges we face beyond our control such as a health issue, an unexpected loss, rising prices, relationship issues, and so many other things. Sometimes we need a break from it all to experience a much-needed uplifting.

With time running out in August we may not be able to travel to Frankenmuth and spend a few hours in the Christmas store there in order to experience this uplifting. We can, however, spend some time reading the familiar stories in the Bible surrounding Christ's birth. As we do so we will find our minds distracted from our current realities and we will be encouraged by the reminders in these stories of how:

- God faithfully keeps His promises as He showed by giving us the Messiah as He promised long ago.
- God does have plans for our lives as we see with Mary and Joseph
- God is in control as we see in the perfect timing for the census to be called requiring Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem.
- God faithfully provides as we see Him leading Joseph and Mary to the stable when there was no room in the inns.
- God brings new life and new starts into our lives as we see with the birth of Christ into Mary and Joseph's lives.

- God speaks to us as He did through the angels sharing the good news with the shepherds in the fields.
- God's light is shining down upon us and still leading us just as it led the shepherds to Bethlehem.
- We can experience joy in worshipping Christ just as the shepherds did.

Imagine being uplifted and encouraged by all these things as a result of spending a little time in August reading the Christmas stories found in the Bible. By doing this we may find ourselves suddenly singing some of our favorite Christmas hymns just like I was doing in the store on Saturday. We may also come away from this time feeling inspired, uplifted, and full of praise for God just like the shepherds did as they returned to the fields.

A few hours of Christmas in August provided me with a real gift to get my mind off everything else and to focus on Christ. This gift provided me with a much-needed uplifting to return to my realities. May each one of us give ourselves this gift before August comes to a close.

Keep Safe and God Bless

Pastor Dean