

CHRISTMAS!

Recently I came across a video about a grandpop. He is getting out of bed as his alarm goes off. He gets up and dressed. The next scene is in the garage with grandpop trying to lift a heavy old fashioned barbell with two hands. And dropping it because it's too heavy. He sees a Christmas tree being delivered to a neighbor's house. Christmas is coming. Each day up at 6:30 and after getting dressed a little breakfast it's into the garage again trying to lift the weight over his head. Neighbor's on the street could see him struggling to lift the weight. Someone called his daughter to come and check in on him to see if he was okay. She walks around the side of the house and he waves her away with that "I'm fine!" look. As the video continued he started to be able finally to raise the weight above his head. And then to hold it there for several seconds.

Suddenly it's Christmas Eve. He gets dressed in his Christmas finery and goes to his daughter's house for the decorating of the tree. He carries a beautifully wrapped box. As he arrives he is greeted by his granddaughter about seven years old. He bends down and gives her the present. Inside is a star for the top of the Christmas tree. She is so excited. He asks her if she wants to place the star on the tree top. She can't wait. She walks to the tree facing it. He stoops behind her and putting a hand on each side of her waist he hoists her up high enough for her to be able to put the star in place. He is able to hold her up for as long as it takes. Slowly he lowers her to the floor. Then he looks at his daughter with a knowing look. Thoughtfulness. Anticipation, Selflessness. Care. Preparation. Christmas.

It was just a little thing. Perhaps his granddaughter will never know. But perhaps she will. Perhaps her mom will tell her some day when she is older and can appreciate the full meaning of the story. It is all born of Christ. There is a grasping of what the Lord did by taking on our flesh and entering into our world in all its complexity, difficulty and need. Jesus brings this love because Jesus is this love. This love is thoughtful and selfless and caring. And just right. Just enough. Just what we needed. Gift. Presence. True joy. Simple things.

My Goddaughter gave me a home-made Christmas card in confession last week. He two younger brothers has signed it and she wrote "Have a safe and healthy Christmas." But she added a little notation she had type out and scotch-taped inside the card. The message was this:

When Jesus was crucified on the cross some thirty-three years after his birth, He would save humanity. This is how much God loved the world. He gave his Son. His one and only Son. And this is why. So that no one need be destroyed. By believing in Him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life."

His one and only Son. God's Word. "I love you." That has become flesh. His word of love has become a human being. But in marriage a man and a woman hold each other's hands, look into each other's eyes and vow: "I will love you and honor you all the days of my life." Somewhere later on as that love is expressed there is a moment when it so overflows and becomes so full of life that it becomes a new life. A child. And their mutual word of love,

promised and vowed, has now become flesh. That is how life enters this world on this earth. And it has been this way from the beginning. But when sin entered everything got twisted and disordered and we lost our way. There was need for a reset. Jesus is that reset. Our original innocence is restored. The Word became flesh and took on a human heart so that in Jesus he could give our repaired hearts back to us. Healed. Restored. Recreated. And as the Christmas Carol proclaims: Til He appeared and the soul found its worth. Yes. That is what we want and that is what we cannot get to by ourselves.

My friends, this Christmas the Lord's message in this pandemic year is that He still desires us to turn to him. He desires us to ask him for his assistance. He desires us to invite Him into our lives. Will we do better in our day than the folks in Bethlehem did in his own day? Jesus' message is that the Father has a place for us—for all of us, for each of us. The Father wants us to be with him. The Father has always wanted us to be with him. There is room in the Father's house but no one will be forced to go there. The way we go there is by allowing His one and only Son entrée into our own lives, into our family, into our relationships, into our thoughts, into our emotions, into our decisions. Not just some but all.

Throughout Advent we have prayed: Come Lord Jesus. Today He has come. Now—let us welcome him, invite him into our own souls. And in order to make this more doable, God's Word comes to us as a small, newborn baby. Let's start there. Let's welcome this Little One of God. Merry Christmas.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.