

I normally take off the Sunday following Christmas. The day after Christmas — or the *days* after Christmas — have usually not been “working” days for me.

Ironically, when we lived in Chicago, for the first two years after Patricia had deviously given me golf clubs for one of my birthdays, part of her plot that ultimately led to my being pastor here, the day after Christmas we hopped planes to the Phoenix area where I could play golf (it rained both times we did this, by the way), and she could visit a good friend who had moved to the Valley from the building in which Patricia lived before marrying me.

So of course, most Christmases since Patricia and I have lived in Arizona, either on Christmas afternoon itself or the day after Christmas, we have hopped a plane to fly away from Arizona, to go visit my sons and their families (I suppose a more honest characterization would be, “to visit granddaughters”). Last year we departed from that practice as on December 26, I hopped a plane to see my Illinois football team play in a most definitely not-very-important bowl game in Dallas. This year, because of Patricia’s work schedule and Illinois’ very disappointing football season, and because I am not so sure it is easy to get a substitute for the day, I am here!

And what does one do after Christmas? Allow me to share a reflection from my recent experience.

As most of you know, a week ago last night the Florence church staged its annual “Live Nativity,” with donkeys and goats, this year a young alpaca, a camel, and church members dressed up as Mary and Joseph, shepherds and angels, and wise men. The live camel is always the highlight of such stagings, not only at Florence but elsewhere, though the wise men did not go to the manger but rather to a house, by tradition, twelve days after Jesus’ birth, on what we call “Epiphany.” We shall have more to say about “Epiphany” next Sunday, which is when, if some of you have been wondering why we did not sing it during our Christmas carol singing, we shall sing “We Three Kings”; that is where it properly fits.

Now, on Sundays following Christmas when I have been away, sometimes the Florence congregation would follow a simple Order of Worship I would prepare, sing some Christmas carols, and watch the video of that year’s “Live Nativity.” So following Christmas Eve worship two nights ago, ShaRON and Gary Liedl, who do the lion’s share of the work on the “Nativity,” handed me a disk to which the video recording had been transferred, figuring I could use it during Sunday worship.

Well. While I had contemplated showing it for the benefit of those who missed this really quite joyous undertaking, a Christmas gift to the community from the church, we have sufficient issues with the projector in Coolidge that it would not be a worthwhile feature, and I felt that I should provide a message — as I had planned. But what really threw me when I sat down to insert the video into the weekly slide presentation, was that the video was in a file format that I could not convert to work on an iPad with any of the programs I had on my home computer, a Mac. The video would have been useless at either church.

Now, I need to back up a minute. I have always tended to be a fairly early adopter of new technology. I bought a CD player before most people had ever heard the term, I had an Apple II, and in business, I had a PC network installed at an early date for such technology. I was the only pastor I knew who had a Blackberry. I also was an early adopter in 2007 of Microsoft's then latest version of Windows, something called "Vista." Don't count the letters; to me, "Vista" is a four letter word. Vista disastrously replaced what had been a really wonderful operating system called "Windows XP," and the "X" part of that describes the kind of language, very un-clergy-like, with which for months I addressed my constantly crashing computer and the aggravations Vista put into my life.

But then something wonderful happened! Something new came into my life. Within about a month of each other, Apple brought out the first iPhone and a new version, called "10.5," of the basic operating system for Mac computers, computers that I thought only a few weirdos and school systems and film editors used. So I got an iPhone just before Thanksgiving in 2007, and on the day after (Apple frequently offers \$100 off that day or some free software), I bought my first Mac — I gave it to Joan Philips a year or so ago, when I bought a new Mac for my own use.

And all of a sudden, as though it were a Christmas gift to Patricia, almost overnight I quit yelling at my computer and the language I would use in addressing it went from NC-17 to G. I suppose you could say that Santa came early in 2007, but in a real sense, my life improved for the better. Not that I did not still have occasional frustrations and . . . well let me explain how this ties into today's comments.

When I sat down yesterday morning the slide presentation I am using was essentially complete but for the slide on which I would embed the video, but when I could not get the video into a format that I could use, I did what anyone would do, screamed , er, *Googled*, and found that there are some programs that will make the video file conversion I required, and more to show appreciation to ShaRON and Gary than anything, I was willing to fork out \$40 that one program cost — except that I spent more than ten minutes unsuccessfully trying to make the purchase! I confess: I did utter a few PG-13 words. Then, realizing that I should not let myself slip into pre-Mac days, I shot off an e-mail for assistance and went back to *Googling* — and found in the desktop equivalent of the iTunes store an application *for free* that did what I needed done.

And it in fact did it.

What is my point?

There are things in life that change us, and even though we may occasionally trip up, we remain changed. That something as simple and relatively superficial as switching to a Mac would improve my language and patience says less about the virtues of a Mac than about my personal shortcomings; that is disappointingly obvious. But there are those things that lead us to be better, or behave better, than we are or were or did — or if not "things," one particular thing..

And that one particular thing is allowing that babe born in Bethlehem to enter into our lives! I give the Mac credit for my language, but of course, it is far more that I felt I was not living up to the standards that Jesus expects of me, and why do I care? Because I let him into my life!

If Jesus remains no more than a figure in a nativity scene, there is little his birth will mean for our day to day lives, but if we let him be more than that, if we let him be an active participant in our lives, sort of a conversation partner with our conscience and conscious, well, I think most of you know.

The would-be-Biblical scholar in me, to which I referred briefly on Thursday evening, enjoys the obvious parallel between the way the writer of 1 Samuel describes the boy Samuel's maturation, and the way the writer of Luke describes Jesus' maturation —

Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and with the people.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor

I shall be blunt: I do not know that as individuals we want to worry about human favor, though we certainly want more of it for the Church, but now that Santa has left, now that we have let Jesus in our hearts, let us not merely clean up our language if we are still on Windows, *let us grow with Jesus*, that is, let the presence of Jesus grow ever larger within us, and even as we increase in years, let us increase in wisdom and in divine favor by letting his light shine in our being, making us better today than we were yesterday, better tomorrow than today (I may be sounding like John Wesley, but I was raised Methodist as you know), and making us ever better bearers to the world, with Jesus present within us, of the Good News that God has come into the world.