

A Palindromical Celebration

Luke 2:1-7

“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to his own town to register. 4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” Luke 2:1-7 (NIV)



One of the neat things about teaching confirmation class is that sometimes I learn thing from the youth. Most of this learning occurs when the students direct things off track as they so often do.

Stephanie Bennett came up with a very interesting sidetracks a couple of weeks ago. She brought up the subject of “Palindromes.”

What’s a palindrome? It’s simply a word that reads the same forward or backward. “Kayak” is a palindrome. Forward or backwards, it’s still spelled, “K-a-y-a-k.” the name “Otto” is a palindrome. Say it forward it’s “Otto.” Say it backwards, it’s still “Otto.”

Palindromes can also be put into phrases and sentences. For example, the phrase, “A Toyota’s a Toyota” read backwards is “A Toyota’s a Toyota”. Or try this one. “A Santa at NASA.” Yep, backwards it’s “A Santa at NASA.” They can also be made into questions such as, “Am I drawn inward, Ima?”. Yep, that’s a palindrome, too. Forward or backward, it’s still the same question.

Some people who have too much time on their hands have even written whole stories that are palindromes. If you read the story backwards, it reads exactly the same. Stephanie shared one with me that was over five pages long! You can find it at <http://bored.com> and <http://palindrome.com>.

Enough about palindromes...almost. When you think about it, palindromes may have a wonderful purpose for us as we celebrate Christmas. Why? Because, if you think about it, these are Palindromes are really neat because, whether you're coming or going, it doesn't make any difference, right? The message in the palindrome is the same coming or going, forward or backwards. No matter how you read it, it’s the exact *same* message.

Let me assure you there are no palindromes in the Christmas story...at least none I know of. But one thing I do know. No matter how you read the Christmas story, no matter which Gospel account you read, no matter which Old Testament prophecy you consider, the Christmas story is the exact same message... no matter how you read it.

Let me give you some examples from the Old Testament prophets.

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Isaiah 9:6 (NIV):

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.”

Micah 5:2 (NIV):

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

No matter how you read these Scriptures, they says the same thing, don't they? Jesus, the Savior, is born.

Or try these Gospel verses.

Matthew 1:23 (NIV):

“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”

Luke 2:6-7 (NIV):

“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

John 1:14 (NIV):

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Yes, I submit, in a way far more profound than a palindrome can communicate, no matter how you read these words—forward, backward, upside down, inside out...whatever you can think of—they still say the same thing. It's the same message. Christ, our Savior, is born!

What does all this mean? It means that since Jesus has come we can come to God. We are forgiven. We are in God's grace. We are made His children because Jesus came as a Child to us. The result? We can go to God.

Interestingly enough, there's a Gospel palindrome that says just that: “Do go to God.” Say it forward, “Do Go To God.” Say it backwards, “Do Go to God.”

That's what we're here for...to Go to God...forward, backwards, anyway we can. God accepts us any way we are...forward, backward, bent out of shape, even broken. In those times, “Do go to God.” And, because of His grace, we can go to God again and again and again and again. Always confident in this: That He will give us His grace.

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What can we say to that? The only thing I can think of is, “Wow!” Hmm...come to think of it, that’s a palindrome, too! Say it forward, “Wow!” Say it backwards, “Wow!” Say it together with an exclamation of joy, “Wow!”

Wow! Christ, our Savior, is born. Let us rejoice! Thank you, God—with all our heart, mind and soul...forward AND backwards—for saving us. Amen.

Another one:

Dammit, I'm mad!