

SLIDE ONE. HOLD. Who are you holding onto? Who's holding onto you?

I hope you enjoyed our interactive tour of the Christmas story – which will end shortly with the hospitality of food and drink and shelter – as a contrast to the experience of Joseph and Mary – who found no room for them for their child to be born. CANDLE 1.

We then had 3 stops: One to remind us – like the shepherds - of who we are before God and how much He loves us. CANDLE 2 + our paper chain of affirmations. One to remind us – like Simeon and Anna – of what we can do when we wait on + partner with God. CANDLES 3 + 4. And one to remind us of the true meaning of Christmas – from the flawed and funny memory of a bunch of young church kids – and then as we read the story from the gospel of Luke.

Good news of great joy – for all people – a Savior born to us. THE CHRIST CANDLE!

SLIDE 2. Someone to hold onto and Someone who holds onto us.

It's been a strange and difficult couple of years – in and out of a worldwide pandemic – yet still tired and a little bit emotionally punch-drunk. Never mind all that we were dealing with before COVID 19: strained relationships, job disappointments, loved ones lost, other physical maladies.

It seems to me that many of us are still finding our feet. And maybe we will in 2023!
What gives you hope?

Here's what gives me hope: The life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And by hope – I don't mean a cockeyed optimism about brighter days ahead – like my faith is only made for a time to come – but rather a confident sense that I can partner with God to do good things – now, that God will help me through my pain and struggles - now, and that God will be the source of all that is good in my life - now.

Someone to hold onto and Someone who holds onto us.

SLIDES 3-5. Someone who knew Jesus reasonably well once said: *All I want is to know (Jesus) Christ and the power that raised him to life. I want to suffer and die as he did, so that somehow, I also may be raised to life.*

That "somehow" is to believe that Jesus is the Savior born to us – for all people – which is good news of great joy.

That man, whose name is Paul, goes on to concede - *I have not yet reached my goal, and I am not perfect. But Christ has taken hold of me. So, I keep on running and struggling to take hold of the prize. My friends, I don't feel I have already arrived. But I forget what is behind, and I struggle for what is ahead. I run toward the goal, so I can win the prize of being called to heaven. This is the prize God offers because of what Christ Jesus has done* (Phil. 3:10-14, CEV).

The prize of being called to heaven is **life with God** – beginning here and now – in this life – and continuing into the next life when we are resurrected from the dead.

Someone to hold onto and Someone who holds onto us.

Someone who's in control when things seem out of control. Someone who isn't the author of chaos or suffering, but the originator of love and grace and mercy. Someone who gives us hope.

It's interesting – when we surrender ourselves to God – how it becomes a paradoxical pathway to control – like – I will take control of what I can *with* God – but I will give control to God of all that I can't control – believing – knowing by faith - that *He* is in control – so that – in the end – we would be able to say, "It's all under control!"

That's healthy perspective!

To help you to remember this idea...

I'd like you to take hold of your right elbow (right arm vertical) with our left hand – like this (DEMO.). This is a physical reminder for *us* to take hold of God. To reach out to Him for hope.

Now – I'd like you to fold your right hand over the top of your left elbow (pivoting) – like this (DEMO.). This is a muscle-memory symbol that God has taken hold of you.

This is a strong hold. And, ironically, it's a kind of self-hug.

This is a picture of...

SLIDE 6. Someone to hold onto and Someone who holds onto us.

We were made for a with-God life – to partner with Him to do good things – now – like hosting on campus Family Fun Fairs, like making food hampers for the Langley Food Bank, like putting together Relief Buckets for the Mennonite Central Committee.

We were made for a with-God life - to get help through our pain and struggles - now – by turning to Him who feels and knows everything and sees the truth of our pain, by being honest with Him about our suffering - like so many who wrote the Psalms, by letting Him comfort and heal us in our inner being and give us peace that surpasses understanding.

We were made for a with-God life - to enjoy all that is good in our lives – now – like family and food and friends, like music and sport and dancing and stories, like warm days on sun-kissed beaches and cozy blankets on cold, winter nights, like clean drinking water and things that just work.

AND we were made for a with-God life to live with God - even *after* we pass from this life.

This is good news of great joy: life and life after life through belief in the God-man, Jesus.

Someone to hold onto and Someone who holds onto us.

I pray that we would get to know Him and the power that raised Him to life.

It's why He came in the first place!