**SCREEN: blank red screen**

Every Wednesday I have dinner with my mom.

This past week as we were putting up some Christmas decorations,

we talked about our family Christmases when I was a kid.

In our neighborhood there was a family that lived across the street:

the Connolly’s.

We were Catholic, they were Catholic.

We had six kids, they had six kids.

We went to the same school, same church, same swimming pool.

Our families were alike in so many ways...but *not* when it came to Christmas.

The Connolly’s went all out for Christmas; and I mean all out!

They had the biggest tree, most Christmas lights on their house,

and the thing I noticed most: Santa brought them lots more presents than us.

I’m talking piles of presents under, beside and stacked all around their tree.

I was jealous!

And I know I complained about it to my parents.

As a kid, I had no appreciation for all the sacrifices my mom and dad

made for Christmas.

Back then I measured my parents love by how much stuff they gave me.

So to all you parents out there, getting ready for Christmas,

I just want you to know, I feel your pain.

I was one of those kids with the ‘gimme’ attitude.

Parents want to provide the best for their children,

but don’t want their love taken for granted.

Parents you know the pressure to prove your love; especially at Christmas.

**SCREEN: Who Needs Christmas main screen**

This is week three of our Advent message series titled,

*Who Needs Christmas*

And if you’re a visitor or guest, welcome!

If you were with us last week you heard testimony from Jen (Katie)

about the pressure a parent feels to create the perfect Christmas.

She also talked about the challenge of keeping our eyes focused on

what Christmas is all about.

It’s not about how many gifts are under the tree but

the one perfect gift of God’s Son Jesus.

In this series we said that the world needs Christmas and

you and I need Christmas.

Today’s take may surprise you a little.

Because today’s message is that God needs Christmas too.

Now let’s find out why.

**SCREEN: blank red screen**

The first bible reading each week of Advent is from

one of the Old Testament prophets.
They were God’s messengers, his spokesmen.

Any time the people got off track with their faith or

took their relationship with God for granted,

He sent a prophet to help lead them back.

But no matter how many prophets God sent,

they never seemed to get it.

Today was the prophet Zephaniah’s turn.

What I love about his message is that it was not a message of gloom and doom;

no judgement, no warning, no fire and brimstone.

It was hopeful and joyful and promises love.

Zephaniah wrote:

**SCREEN: Shout for joy…**

**Be glad and exult…**

**Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged!**

**The Lord, your God, is in your midst,**

**a mighty savior;**

**he will rejoice over you with gladness,**

**and renew you in his love.**

Zephaniah believed that if the people only knew how much

God loves them they’d stay close always.

He was saying God loves his children freely...it’s a total gift;

not something they could deserve or earn.

And their mission as God’s children is to share his gift with others.

St. Paul in the second reading today echoed Zephaniah.

Paul wrote this, *‘Rejoice!*

*Don’t be anxious or worried or stressed;*

*be joyful and peaceful and hopeful.’*

And for Paul, the reason to rejoice and have hope is that

God sent Jesus to prove how much he loves us.

God is a parent….a loving father, a loving mother.

And like all parents God wants the best for his children;

wants them to know just how much they are loved and cared for.

But in any family, children sometimes miss this truth.

I know I did when I was a kid.

Deep down, I knew my parents only wanted the best for me.

But at times I rebelled and thought

*‘my parents are trying to make my life miserable*

*with all their rules and their demands.’*

It wasn’t true, but it’s what I thought.

Well even God struggled with with His children!

Look at all God did for them:

—he freed them from slavery in Egypt,

—gave them the covenant so they’d know how to be happy,

—promised to be with them always, no matter how hard times got,

—sent prophets whenever they forgot about his love.

All these amazing things….but it was ever enough.

In spite of everything they remained ungrateful.

God needed to do something dramatic to prove his love once and for all.

**SCREEN: Manger in Bethlehem**

Well Christmas is God getting his children’s attention

in the most loving way possible.

God could have chosen any way he wanted to save his children from sin and death.

God chose to take on human flesh, to become really one of us.

And God did so knowing all we are capable of.

Knowing that we sin, and fail, and grow lukewarm and cold,

and are unfaithful and ungrateful.

Even knowing His only Son would be rejected and put to death—

God still came to save us.

Knowing everything about us God still loves us.

And think about it: Jesus never said to anyone,

*‘Stop sinning and then I’ll love you.’*

Never said, ‘*get your act together and you can follow me.’*

Never preached*, ‘Become perfect then join my Church.’*

He wouldn’t have had any followers if he did!

No Apostles...*Sorry Peter!*

God proved His love in sending Jesus.

And Jesus demonstrated it profoundly by dying for us.

But unless and until you accept God’s love,

freely, unconditionally and unreservedly,

you’ll never fully get what being a member of Christ’s church is all about

or what Christmas truly means.

Because it’s this love we celebrate at Christmas.

And sadly, some church goers live their whole lives and don’t quite get it.

Don’t be one of them.

Know that God loves you...just as you are.

Believe that Jesus came to save you...you personally.

Be joyful knowing that you are welcome here, everyone is.

And trust that you can experience God's love in

a new and profound way this Christmas.

**SCREEN: December 25 calendar**

So it’s just a little more than a week until Christmas.

That sentence may fill you with joy or dread.

If you’re feeling anxious and stressed,

wishing for the peace and joy Zephaniah and Paul talked about,

fear not...you can find it...it is possible and it’s not too late.

Even amid the noise and pressure of the Christmas machine

that is out there running at full blast,

God wants to bless you and renew you.

But you’ll have to make an effort; you’ll have to meet God halfway.

Trust me though, you don’t need to make a huge effort to

have the kind of Christmas God wants for you.

With just a couple, simple, things you can experience true Christmas joy.

I’ll mention just two ways.

First, in the next week, take a few minutes a day for prayer.

Stop by the religious goods stand after Mass and get one of the Little Blue Books.

It has a short reading and reflection for each day of Advent.

Best of all, it is only $1.

Just five minutes a day of quiet, prayerful reflection can

help you appreciate the gift of God’s love this Christmas.

**SCREEN: Christmas invite card image**

Second, help someone else appreciate God’s love.

At the exits you’ll find our Christmas invite cards (hold up)

listing our schedule of Masses.

Grab one or two of these on your way out.

I’m sure you have a family member, a friend, a neighbor

or co-worker who doesn’t have a place

to worship at Christmas.

Give them the card; invite them to celebrate at St. Pius.

You can help someone else discover God’s gift of love this Christmas.

So do one thing for yourself and one thing for another person

and I guarantee you will transform your experience of Christmas.

You’ll go from feeling stressed and anxious to feeling peaceful and joyful.

**SCREEN: Manger in Bethlehem (again)**

I began this message talking about my Christmas as a child.

I thought it was all about a mountain of presents under a tree.

Now I know it’s about finding God in simple and humble ways.

This Christmas, may we all grow in our appreciation of

the amazing gift of God’s love…His Son Jesus...born to save us.