

### **Are you ready for Christmas!?**

That is one of my least favorite questions this time of year. Because I never know exactly what the person asking it means. Do they mean have you gotten your Christmas cards out? Or that you've decorated the house, the yard, the dog and the cat and the woods beyond? Or that you've done all your baking? (which reminds me that the pecan pie is still in the oven. Would someone please go take it out of the oven so it doesn't burn?) Maybe they mean – have you done all your Christmas shopping? And now of course, you are remembering that you still haven't gotten anything for Aunt Sally, who will be here at 8.

### **Are you ready for Christmas?**

Last night 10 Emmanuelites went out to the local prison – Augusta Correctional Center, to lead a Lessons and Carols service. There were very few signs of Christmas out there. After we had gotten through our typical process of walking through the scanning machine, being patted down, turning in drivers licenses, going through several clanging doors within the barbed wire fence, we did see one Christmas tree decorated with ornaments. Then we arrived at our destination – the gym, where our services are usually held. Generally it is a pretty grim place. there are odd signs, “don't spit on the mats!” And a seemingly random drawing of a phoenix on the wall. No signs of Christmas in there, no smells of baked cookies or hot apple cider, no baskets of Christmas cards, no wrapped presents under the trees, no manger scenes anywhere.

And yet these men, the inmates who had chosen to attend the Lessons and Carols service, also known as the Christmas Adam service because it's held the night before Christmas EVE – these men **were ready for Christmas!** The 80 or so inmates who came into the gym last night were not dressed in reds and greens but in the normal faded denim jeans and shirts but they were **ready for Christmas.**

Their hearts were ready. We could hear it in their voices. They sang the carols with beautiful voices, they read the lessons with dignity and care; they greeted us Emmanuelites with utmost respect with joy on their faces. They seemed so glad that we had come, as if we brought something of God to them, and yet I think I can speak for our group, that God came to us that night through them.

They were ready for Christmas because they knew of their need for God. They were ready for God to be a part of their lives. They were ready for Jesus' love and forgiveness.

As we left the prison last night I marveled that 10 members of Emmanuel would make this commitment to come out there so close to Christmas, and one said back – This service out here centers me; it reminds me of what Christmas is all about.

So I pass that wisdom on to you. You don't need those perfect decorations, you don't need the perfectly wrapped gifts, the holiday clothes, you don't need the delicious pecan pie to be ready for Christmas. (well maybe you do need the pecan pie)

To be ready for Christmas, you just need to be ready for Christ. Ready to receive and share forgiveness, and peace and love. Yes, you need love. **Love is all you need.**