

Coffee Buzz | President Scott Murphy and President Prophet Steve Veazey Replay

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Steve Veazey, Scott Murphy, Linda Booth, Robin Linkhart

Robin Linkhart 00:28

Hello and welcome to a special Project Zion Podcast Christmas edition, featuring Community of Christ President Scott Murphy and Prophet President Steven Veazey, sharing treasured Christmas memories and cherished family traditions from the time they were children until now as parents and grandparents. Our host Linda Booth also shares some favorite Christmas moments. Today's podcast features excerpts from full length Coffee Buzz episodes, originally posted in December 2021 and December 2020. Sit back with your favorite cup of Christmas cocoa, and enjoy a wonderful trip down memory lane with Scott, Steve and Linda. You'll be glad you did.

Linda Booth 01:22

It's, it's always so good to be with you, my friend, especially to talk with you during the Advent, which reminds all of us as Christians of the sacred meaning of Christmas. Despite the traditional family preparations taking place like buying and wrapping presents, and decorating the tree and sending email and mail Christmas cards, etc. Advent reminds us to remember to wait for and prepare for the birth of Jesus. When you were growing up, how did you and your family prepare for Christmas?

Scott Murphy 01:55

Oh, well, Advent was not a tradition practiced in the church in our family back when I was growing up in kind of the same way we do today in the life of the church. I certainly have memories as a child of, of the Christmas story being explored in those weeks leading up to Christmas following the Thanksgiving holiday in the US. So our preparation usually involved getting ready for the Christmas pageant that the congregation had each year and usually myself and my brother and sister would participate in that at some level, in some of the roles. I remember, you know, the preparation and just the experience of going Caroling as part of the congregation in youth group. Which seems strange, because I just don't see that happening a lot anymore. But and then I think one of the final kind of experiences as a family sharing in that time in preparation for Christmas was always participating together in that Christmas Eve service, followed by then coming home and sharing a special meal together. So I have vivid memories as a kid like that growing up and how we would we would celebrate Christmas in that way. Probably in more of the traditional sense. You know, some of my other memories growing up as a kid was always going up into the mountains to find a Christmas tree. So really, again, growing up out in Washington State, we could get a special permit from the forest service to go out and find a Christmas

tree out in the forests and cut down and I even remember one of those times it just really vivid in my memory of we had gotten an early snow and tromping through the snow out looking for a Christmas tree in that way. So that was always fun until you had to cut it down and then had to haul it back to the car. So yes, I also remember that, um. You know, when I was really young, my dad usually had to work on Christmas day if the holiday fell on a weekday and so the memories of those times of waking up really early. So we could as a family share the gifts and opening and gifts before my dad had to leave for work and then anticipating the anticipation of him being able to come home after later in the afternoon that we could share in that Christmas dinner together. So, yeah, a lot of those kinds of memories, both in the traditional side and, and again, the Advent side and how that would all come together was really a special time. Especially since we didn't really have a lot of extended family around so Christmas was really just, you know, my mom and dad and the in the three siblings together. So that was it was a special time and again, those were really important periods for us and still really valued memories that I have.

Linda Booth 05:16

Oh, that sounds like a wonderful growing up. Now I don't imagine you and Sandra and the boys go out and cut a Christmas tree. But do you continue any of those traditions with your two sons? Or were new traditions added?

Scott Murphy 05:31

Yeah, when Sandra and I began to have children, we did continue some of those traditions. You know, I did not grow up with grandparents home because you know, they were either deceased or live far away when I was a young child. So for Sandra and I, it was really important that we wanted our sons to have that connection with grandparents. So Christmas was always shared with my side of the family or Sandra's side of the family. And that extended way that that was really an important time of connection for the boys with the grandparents and other family members. And even today, it's it is usually my son's who initiate the question of when we will get the family together over Zoom. And so that, that still pleases me. But that's still an important part even though we're living in different parts of the US that that ability and that desire to be together. Sandra and I would always spend the time reading the Christmas story during the Advent season with the boys and maybe like a lot of parents with young children, we would have the advent calendar or calendar, you know, that we would take part in each day as part of that, that journey up to Christmas. And then again, as part of the family sharing in that Christmas Eve service together. Prayer was always a tradition too that came out of my family that I just always remember on Christmas morning. My dad saying let's pause and pray a prayer of thankfulness before we would open gifts. And that was a tradition that we carried on with the boys. And so it was always that time of just pausing to be thankful about just life and other things before we jumped in and started opening gifts and sharing in that joyful moments. So I yeah, I remember those moments with the boys that was still really important. Yeah, we would when the boys were still younger, and we were still living out in Washington, we would we continued the tradition of going out and cutting a Christmas tree. Unfortunately, that kind of changed when we moved to Iowa. Not the same, but now that my youngest son Michael you know lives back out in Washington. It's a tradition that he is now doing with his kids and family. So I enjoy hearing him talk about that. I was surprised last year this was this was something that just kind of caught me off guard that our youngest son had called us up and at that time his daughter was his youngest daughter was about a year and a half at that point. Michael asked if

Sandra and I still had this Christmas Village kind of setting that we used at Christmas when the boys were growing up. And you know we would put that out every year. And now with the young child, Michael said I want Lennon to be able to have that experience and to see that village in the manger and all of that growing up. And so sure enough, Sandra and I still had that we don't we didn't have it out that year and it was down in one of our boxes. So I went down found it packed it up and shipped it out to Michael and he's now been using that with his family for the last couple years. And then again hearing the stories about our granddaughter Lennon who just every time they put that up just loves to go and look at the lights in the little village and in the manger and all of that, so it's really good. So that that's good stuff. And it's, I think, in terms of, you know, carrying on traditions now, what's interesting is watching our adult children now begin infusing other traditions that come from their, their companions and their family. And my oldest son, his, his wife is Jewish. And so they, they celebrated Hanukkah this year. And so that's just another tradition kind of coming into his family experience. And so it's been interesting to both watch, observe and experience that as we, as we take part with, with both the boys and their families now.

Linda Booth 10:18

Yeah, so that's marvelous. One of the traditions, my husband, Doug, and I had with our three sons, was always reading the story of Jesus's birth and the shepherds, finding the baby line in a manger, as told in the second chapter of Luke. And we always read it on Christmas Eve, before they went to bed. We tried to read it on Christmas morning, but discovered, when they were little that they didn't pay that much attention. So we would to it on Christmas Eve before they went to bed. And I also remember all the Christmas pageants at the Olathe Kansas Community of Christ, when the boys would be shepherds, and, you know, wise men, and even upon occasion, Joseph, and often during the Advent, worships the scriptures would focus on the perspective of, for example, what the innkeeper was thinking, or the shepherds, do you resonate with one of the people in the scripture story? And if so, who and why?

Scott Murphy 11:19

That's a really good question, Linda. as I as I think about, you know, again, having used that scripture story, as part of a Dwelling in the Word, spiritual practice, you know, at times over the years, I have found myself recognizing that in many ways, it probably depends on where my life is at certain times. You know, so I, you know, I have moments of profound disruption. You know, like, you know, as we have talked and as I've shared with, with the listeners in the past, you know, when my call to an apostle, and then call to the First Presidency, that we're really disruptive. It's in those moments where I can really resonate with what Mary must have felt like, you know, to encounter, you know, God's Messenger, and, you know, what, what God was preparing to do and in and through her life, and, you know, there are moments in life when I, I feel like I would resonate with the shepherds who were out doing their job, and clueless to what was happening, until something awakens them. I definitely can think of times in my life when I would resonate with Joseph's initial reaction of just wanting to break free from the situation and not get caught up in the drama that could unfold. And there's been times when, life just felt overwhelming that, you know, I had no room in me. So finding that connection with the innkeeper makes sense. So you know, that's, in many ways, that's the value about the story. I think what I, what I find so meaningful is the story in its raw human life that occurs in multiple dimensions that

get played out. But ultimately, in that story, all of those different human life and dimensions come together at a point of hope, peace, joy and love at the manger.

Linda Booth 13:34

Scott, I've enjoyed this conversation so much. Merry Christmas to you and your family, their friend. And thank you for sharing your Christmas memories and traditions, and for your great faith in God and dedication to God. God's people in the church. Thank you so much, my friend.

Scott Murphy 13:52

Well, Merry Christmas to you and all the listeners too!

Linda Booth 13:55

his year is almost over. And now we're in the Advent season of spiritual preparation to celebrate the Christ child's birth. Sunday, I participated in a congregation Advent service focused on love like most people did. It was a lovely Zoom worship. But I missed hearing the voices around me singing the carols that we sang online, where everyone was muted. "O Come All Ye Faithful" and "Silent Night." And it seems like I'm remembering more memories from the past. Perhaps it's because our family traditions will be different this year because of the health experts who are urging us to stay home or limit the number of family and friends who gather together. So the disruption of Christmas traditions has caused me to think about those past Christmases. And I've been thinking a lot about childhood memories. My brother Gary and sister Jan and I spending the night on Christmas Eve with our grandmother and grandfather Tim. And then the next morning driving to our home, where Mom would have breakfast ready and we'd open presents. How did you spend Christmas as a child growing up in Paris, Tennessee?

Steve Veazey 15:11

Even as you were talking, I was having flashbacks of memories of different aspects of that and they're wonderful memories. And just to review some of them—wonderful experiences at church with my faith family. Those all kind of blend together. But worship experiences around the Christmas season. A lot of candles, I seem to remember the beautiful candles. Visits to both sets of grandparents who fortunately lived not too far away, nearby. And we would go just before or on Christmas Eve. Christmas Day was primarily spent at home with our immediate family. I have a distinct memory of the Tennessee Kentucky District choir coming to the Paris Branch for a Christmas concert. And it stands out to me as a child, I think because it was the first time I heard the song that I can remember, "Go Tell it On the Mountain." And the choir really leaned into it that Sunday, and I was impressed as a child. So that, that has stuck with me ever since. Even the faces of the choir as they were singing. As a young boy, track into the woods with my hand axe and select a usually pretty scraggly cedar tree, to bring home to be our family Christmas tree. One time I broke the top of the tree and I was quite distressed, I got it all the way home and the top was leaning at a right angle. I don't remember what we did. But we, we always decorated the tree I brought home and somehow my folks had a way of making it look wonderful. And I still miss the smell of cedar. That whole experience results in I miss the smell of cedar trees associated with Christmas. But a particularly powerful memory is that every year my dad would, would take my brother and me to participate in a community service club fundraising effort that involved collecting money in, in baskets at the major traffic intersections in Paris, Paris being what Paris is, of course, those weren't

interstates or, or anything. But (at) the major intersections—we would collect money. And the money was used to purchase boxes of food to take to what I remember us referring to as the "down and out families" in the community or the needy families in the, in the community. And to complete the experience, my dad would take my brother and I to distribute some of the boxes to the families. And I have a distinct memory of driving up to a dilapidated home barely hanging together and taking a box of food up and setting it on the porch. And, and experiencing children literally barging through the door and grabbing at the box and even tearing open packages of food and starting to eat right there on the, on the porch. And that, that's had a tremendous impact. And that scene keeps coming back and back. And it really balances out the more consumer oriented consumption aspects of Christmas for me. So I'm always aware of people in need. That's part of who I am to this day.

Linda Booth 19:57

Yes. I'm thankful you had that experience. I had several types of experiences like that growing up. too. Did any of those childhood traditions continue when you and Cathi married?

Steve Veazey 20:10

Well, we've always had a beautiful Christmas tree. That's primarily due to Cathi's effort. And, and although the people shifted over time, because of me becoming a part of Cathi's family, and being some distance away from my family in Tennessee. So different people were involved. But always the experience of spending time with family, and making a point of being together, usually sharing a meal, but being together, continued and continues to this day. I was just talking with one of our grandsons yesterday about Christmas, and he was wanting to know why we give gifts, which was a wonderful opportunity for me to talk about the Christmas story, and the wise men and then I shifted into my theological mode, and said, "Of course the greatest gift was Jesus Christ that that God gave us and that's a reason we give gifts." And then I said, "Ultimately, we give the gift of our lives to each other." And I realized I had probably exceeded what he was actually expecting in response to his to his answer, but it reaffirmed for both of us the importance of, of being together.

Linda Booth 21:46

Yeah. From second grade through high school, my family and I attended Stone Church which for Coffee Buzz listeners who've been in Independence that's the stone, old Stone Church across the street from the Auditorium in Independence, Missouri. And I have fond memories of sitting together, and whenever anyone would pray, my dad would link hands, we'd all hold hands. You talked about choirs, Stone Church always had an incredible choir and I remember how they sang the Christmas carols during the Advent season. I remember going on with the Zion's League to sing carols to church members. And as an adult, I remember Mark and Karen Kendrick decorating the Olathe congregation in Olathe Kansas during the Advent season. And every Sunday, they added another fantastic element. I don't mean something small. I mean, something amazingly beautiful to the Nativity or to the building. And I also remember candles, Christmas Eve candlelight services where the Holy Spirit just seemed to be tangible. I know you've already mentioned a little bit about worships when you were growing up. Can you remember some of your favorite Advent worship memories in particular?

Steve Veazey 23:10

Well, we always had some kind of children's Christmas program, and having the opportunity to participate in that was meaningful, having various roles to play in that. But I, I hate to admit it, but in growing up in in Paris, we didn't have Advent specific worship services like we do now related to the liturgical calendar. We really didn't know what that was. The liturgical calendar didn't really cause us to have a certain schedule with certain themes. But what I remember is, as we entered December, in the worship services Christmas hymns would begin to appear with increasing number. And that was a signal we're moving towards Christmas. So I guess the effect was kind of the same. You, you develop expectations for what is coming. And all of that grew in number and focus until just before Christmas. I think I mentioned previously about some of the singing in the District and the congregation, or Branch then. The congregation I grew up in was extremely gifted with good singing and musicians, some who were teachers involved in music education, so we were really blessed. And we had one person who was really a beautiful vocalist. And he sounded a lot like Elvis Presley, which really, really made an impact. And whenever his name appeared in the bulletin, I remember either my mother or grandmother, one of them would say, "Oh, it's going to be a good one today!" referring to the worship. And a little side note, I remember often when he sung, people in the congregation would say, "Well, I sure hope he'll sing at my funeral." That's kind of a southern thing, 'cause your funeral is the last chance to make a good impression on everybody else. I remember music, I guess is what I'm saying. Beautiful, beautiful hymns. And that is really what stitches together the whole fabric of my memories of Christmas.

Linda Booth 26:07

Yes, yeah, those Christmas carols even like last Sunday, when they had a video of "O Come All Ye Faithful" and "Silent Night" in the place of our congregational singing. When you hear those songs, they bring back just a flood of warmth and love and memories. Those carols do connect us in very powerful ways to the story of Jesus's birth.

Steve Veazey 26:33

Yes, absolutely.

Linda Booth 26:34

Steve, what are some of your hopes for the church as you anticipate the new year?

Steve Veazey 26:41

Well, I hope that people will have even more hope, because there's reasons for that hope that they sense and, and see, I hope we won't just return to normal. I hope we will be, we will thoroughly think about and discuss what, what have we learned about the nature of our lives, creation, ministry, church life in the midst of difficult times, and apply that experience to a broader and more effective array of how we do mission, ministry and outreach around the world. I think we've discovered some new depths of need, as well as some new resources for expressing the love and peace of Christ throughout the world. So I hope we maintain significant online ministries at every aspect of church life. And I especially hope we use that to make us even more connected as a worldwide church family. We, we primarily experience local expressions of the church if we're involved. But one of the blessings and strengths of Community of Christ is it keeps us connected globally, which I think causes us to be more in harmony with God's understanding of creation, and how God loves the whole world. And that's one of the gifts that Community of Christ offers. I hope we've been spiritually deepened by this difficult and challenging

time, in ways that will allow us to even more authentically live the passions of Christ. It's often in times of suffering, or in association with people who are suffering, that we get in touch with the deeper, more essential aspects of the gospel that sustain people, that bring healing and hope into their lives. And I hope that this experience helps us be even more sensitive to the suffering and struggling of people in the world. And that it's revealed to us both the depth of what that is, but also helped us discover as a church even more capacity to offer ministry. And I guess I hope that as a church, we will continue to discover our future as a spiritual movement engaged in Christ inspired community building, especially communities that produce justice, both within the church and in the larger community. And, and I hope that all of this results in that kind of continued transformation in the life of the church. So that would be some of my hopes.

Linda Booth 30:36

Absolutely, yes. Well, I thank you, dear friend, for sharing your reflections on the past. And a little bit about your family memories of past Christmases. And especially, I'm thankful for you sharing your hopes for the future, which appears—if we live that hope to its fullest—will make a difference and transform not only our lives, but our communities and our neighborhoods as well. So Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you and your family. And, and thank you Coffee Buzz listeners for joining our conversation. May your journey through this holy season be filled with God's love, joy, hope and peace. And may the good memories of past Christmases bring you joy and renewed hope for the next year. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you and your family.

Robin Linkhart 31:31

All of us here at Project Zion Podcast wish you and yours a blessed 12 Days of Christmas and a very happy new year. Thanks so much for sharing part of your holiday with us. This is Robin Linkhart, and you are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Take good care. Bye bye