



ILLUSTRATION BANK

The Incredible Seashell Rooster

Illustration Exchange, Mitchell Dillon

Illustration: As a family in ministry, we often didn't get a lot of quality family time during the holidays. So we had a tradition of taking a post-Christmas family road trip to sunny Florida. Along with a few gifts, each of our kids was given some cash and the opportunity, along the way, to pick out a few things for themselves. Inevitably, during these trips, we would end up in a south Florida gift shop. It was during one of those gift shop stops when my youngest son, probably 6 or 7 years old at the time, first spotted an amazing rooster designed almost entirely out of seashells. He was completely enamored by it. He was also convinced that I would love it as much as he did. So he took the seashell rooster to the man at the register to find out how much it would cost him. After completely emptying his pockets of what was supposed to be *his* Christmas money, and some negotiation over the difference, he was so proud to walk away with that amazing seashell rooster for me, his father.

Application: From a practical point of view, I have never been given a more worthless gift. But when measured in terms of the sacrifice involved, I have never been given a more meaningful gift. In fact, of all of the gifts I've received over the years, the seashell rooster is still on my mantle. And its value to me only grows with time. Although it serves no practical purpose, that rooster will always remind me of the time when my son completely forgot about himself, sacrificing all the money he had, in order to bless *me*. For that reason, it will always be one of my most valued possessions.

Something similar happened two-thousand years ago when God forgot about Himself ...

Praying in the Wrong Direction

Ross Ibbetson, *The Daily Mail*, Oct. 19, 2018

Illustration: The Daily Mail reports that worshipers at a mosque in Turkey have been praying in the wrong direction for 37 YEARS! According to one news outlet, the mosque was built facing the wrong direction in 1981. To make matters worse, it is believed that this was the result of it being built based on the original mosque, which would mean that these worshipers have not been praying in the direction of Mecca, as prescribed, even longer than previously thought.

Application: Life can be confusing, but when we get our religion wrong, it really complicates things. The birth of Jesus was God's way of helping us get it right.

Two Headed Monster

<https://preacherpollard.com>

Illustration: A woman in Woodbridge, Virginia, saw a rarity in her front yard: a two-headed copperhead snake. The snake only has one heart and one set of lungs, but each head has its own brain. This leads to multiple problems. Both heads want to eat, but since eating takes time, the snake is vulnerable to predators for twice as long. Further, each head wants to go its own way. That means they can't respond as quickly when under attack. Even getting water can be precarious, as one head can drag the other down when drinking.



An expert at the Wildlife Center of Virginia said, “Based on the anatomy, it would be better for the right head to eat, but it may be a challenge since the left head appears more dominant” (Dana Hedgpeth, *The Washington Post*, 9/24/18). Experts also say that these internal conflicts prevent these rare “dual-cephalic” creatures from living very long.

Application: James tells us that the double-minded man is unstable in all his ways (1:7), and implies that double-mindedness reflects impurity of heart (4:8). Jesus taught, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth” (Matthew 6:24). We must choose to whom we will listen if we are to avoid spiritual peril (Joshua 24:15). Application: It is hard to find peace when we are unsure, unstable, or uncommitted. In some ways, we become our own two-headed monster.

Soul Dysmorphia

<https://www.homileticsonline.com/PreviewInstallment/93041201>

Illustration: In a selfie-oriented world in which people often want to look their best, some are digitally altering their faces and bodies using airbrushes, apps, and filters. The glamorized version of themselves on the internet bears only a slight resemblance to their real-world appearance. This disconnect now has a clinical name: Snapchat dysmorphia. But what happens when the disconnect between the real and the virtual spills over into our spiritual lives? We call that soul dysmorphia.

Application: Soul dysmorphia seeks to present something as real when it is not. Sometimes we do this with religion. We make it look all nice and pleasant, but it lacks real substance. James 1:27 reminds us that real, not a virtual look-a-like, is this: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” Is it possible we also do this with Christmas?

Christmas Is

<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/christmas-is-edward-frey-sermon-on-birth-of-jesus-54469?ref=SermonSerps>

Illustration: “Christmas is sleigh bells. Christmas is sharing. Christmas is holly. Christmas is caring.” At least that’s what Percy Faith once wrote. In his not-so-familiar holiday song, entitled, Christmas Is, he tried to capture some of the things that make Christmas, well, Christmas. The sights, sounds, and feelings – apparently, that’s what Christmas is. And most would agree.

Application: Actually, Christmas is about much more than just sharing warm emotions and memories. It’s about what God supplies and shares. John 1:14a shares the Good News that Jesus “became flesh and made His dwelling among us.” Christmas is about God’s faithfulness made tangible through history. It’s about how God has touched our lives with His love. So, what is Christmas? Well, CHRISTMAS IS ... 1) For People Who Have Nothing, and it’s 2) For People Who Need Everything.

Timing Is Key

<https://www.preachingtoday.com/sermons/sermons/2017/december/connecting-dots-at-christmas.html>

Illustration: The great preacher Haddon Robinson tells a story about a married woman who decided to go on her own private vacation to Europe. She went from the Midwest to London and then she was planning to go to Paris, Rome, and Vienna. When she got to London, she called her husband back home in the Midwest and said, "How are you doing?" Her husband said, "I'm doing fine but our cat Lucy died." So his wife starts bawling her eyes out on the phone. But when she regains her composure, she says, "You insensitive brute of a man, why did I ever marry someone like you? You just have no concern about my feelings." The husband said, "Well, what was I supposed to have said?" The wife thinks for a moment and she says, "Well, when I got to London and I called you as I just did, you could have said, 'Lucy, our cat is on the roof.' When I got to Paris you could have said, 'Lucy, our cat fell down from the roof.' When I got to Rome you could have said, 'Lucy's not doing so well.' When I got to Vienna you could have said, 'Lucy died.'" Then the wife said, "By the way, how is mother?" The husband responded, "She's on the roof." That wife thought her husband had bad timing insofar as delivering news.

Application: Timing is critical in life. It's critical in the stock market. It's critical in sports. It's critical in the delivery of children. Timing is really critical in much of life. The timing of Jesus coming to earth was important back then, but more importantly, it's critical right now. The Bible speaks to the issue of timing in 2 Corinthians 6:2b (ESV): "Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Christmas could be God's time for you.

A Little Christmas Humor (maybe very little!)

When you stop believing in Santa Claus is when you start getting clothes for Christmas.

I told Santa you were good this year.... and He hasn't stopped laughing since!

A Christmas Gift

A guy bought his wife a beautiful diamond ring for Christmas. After hearing about this extravagant gift, a friend of his said, "I thought she wanted one of those sporty four-wheel-drive vehicles."

"She did," he replied. "But where was I going to find a fake Jeep?"

Entering Heaven

Three men died on Christmas Eve and were met by Saint Peter at the pearly gates.

"In honor of this holy season," Saint Peter said, "You must each possess something that symbolizes Christmas to get into heaven."

The first man fumbled through his pockets and pulled out a lighter. He flicked it on. "It represents a candle," he said. "You may pass through the pearly gates," Saint Peter said.

The second man reached into his pocket and pulled out a set of keys. He shook them and said, "They're bells." Saint Peter said, "You may pass through the pearly gates."

The third man started searching desperately through his pockets and finally pulled out a pair of women's glasses.

St. Peter looked at the man with a raised eyebrow and asked, "And just what do those symbolize?"

The man replied, "They're Carol's."

A Sign of the Times

As a little girl climbed onto Santa's lap, Santa asked the usual, "And what you like for Christmas?" The child stared at him open-mouthed and horrified for a minute, then gasped, "Didn't you get my email?"

Santa Stats

From <http://www.JOKE-OF-THE-DAY.com>

- There are currently 78 people named S. Claus living in the U.S. -- and one Kriss Kringle. (You gotta wonder about that one kid's parents)
- December is the most popular month for nose jobs.
- Weight of Santa's sleigh loaded with one Beanie Baby for every kid on earth: 333,333 tons.
- Number of reindeer required to pull a 333,333-ton sleigh: 214,206 – plus Rudolph.
- Average wage of a mall Santa: \$11 an hour. With real beard: \$20 an hour.
- To deliver his gifts in one night, Santa would have to make 822.6 visits per second, sleighing at 3,000 times the speed of sound. At that speed, Santa and his reindeer would burst into flame instantaneously.