

December 24, 2018

The Gifts of Christmas

*The Gift of a Savior*

Luke 2:1-7

**Opening words:** Christmas wouldn't be the same without gift giving. Many have traced the tradition back to the story of the Magi, Matthew 2:1-12. It is a story that is both traditional and Biblical. Tradition tells us there were three Magi or kings. Tradition also tells us their names, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. The Bible tells us they presented the infant Jesus with three gifts. They gave him gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Each gift presented some aspect of Jesus's life. The gold was a gift for a king. The frankincense was a gift for a priest. The myrrh was a gift for one who was going to die. I do not know what happened to those gifts, but I do know gift giving is a big part of the holiday season. I do not know of anyone who doesn't give gifts. I do not know anyone who doesn't want to receive a gift.

This evening, I am going to conclude my Advent sermon series, *The Gifts of Christmas*. We have been looking at the eternal gifts of this sacred season. We have looked at the four themes of the four Sundays of Advent: hope, love, joy and peace. Tonight, we will look at the greatest gift you will ever receive: Jesus. Let me call this message *The Gift of a Savior*. Our Gospel reading is Luke 2:1-7.

**Luke 2:1-7** In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> And everyone went to their own town to register. <sup>4</sup> So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

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The unnamed angel in the first chapter of Matthew said, "*She will give birth to a son, and you will give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*" Those words are profound and the perfect quote for Christmas Eve. If those words sound familiar, say, **"Amen!"**

Everyone knows the name Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821). He was a French statesman and military leader, who rose to prominence during the French Revolution. He was the Emperor of France from 1804-1814, and for a short time in 1815. During those years he dominated Europe. In 1809, the name Napoleon grabbed the headlines of every international newspaper. Yet, under the headlines God was at work.

The year 1809 was quite a year in the history of the world. For in that year, some significant babies were born. For example, in 1809, William Gladstone (1809-1898) was born. He grew up to be one of England's finest statesmen. The great writer Alford Lloyd Tennyson (1809-1892) was born in 1809 to a minister and his wife. In 1809, Oliver Wendall Holmes (1809-1894) was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In Boston, Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) was born. In 1809, a physician and his wife, the Darwins, welcomed their son into the world. They named him Charles Robert (1809-1882). In 1809, a baby was born in a log cabin in Hardin County, Kentucky to the Lincolns. They named him Abraham (1809-1865). Napoleon may have been dominating the headlines, but God was moving under the headlines. It has always been that way.

The headline on the day Jesus was born must have read: HIGHER TAXES! No one wanted to read that headline because no one wants higher taxes. Yet, taxes cannot be ignored. So for that reason, a decree went out throughout the entire Roman world. Everyone had to return home to be counted for tax reasons. Joseph was not excluded. He was required to return to his hometown, Bethlehem. It is not as simple as it sounds. Joseph was traveling with his true love, Mary. The journey began in Nazareth, Mary's hometown, so the journey was seventy miles long. To make the story even more complicated, Mary was pregnant, and Joseph was not the biological father. She conceived, not by the help of a man, but through the Holy Spirit. Timing is everything. The child comes after the long journey. Some say he came in a barn, some say he was born in a cave. Regardless, the baby was born surrounded by animals, so they had to be careful where they stepped. Joseph and Mary did as God commanded. According to the Gospel of Matthew, they gave him the name Jesus. It is important that you know Jesus means "to save." This evening, this is the question you must answer: What did Jesus save us from? This evening, I am going to look at three answers to that one question. If you are ready to look at the first answer, say, "**Amen!**" First, Christ came to save us from disillusionment.

One of the great stories of this season is *A Christmas Carol*. It was written by Charles Dickens (1812-1870) in 1843. You know the story. The theology is poor, but the theme is wonderful. The story revolves around a man named Ebenezer Scrooge. When we first meet him, he is a selfish, greedy businessman. His now famous response, "Bah Humbug!" has become a symbol of a disillusioned spirit. However, thanks to the visits of three ghosts, the ghosts of past, present and future, on Christmas Eve, Scrooge is transformed. By Christmas morning his transformation is complete. He became generous, loving, and a gracious servant of society. The reason our society can't get enough of *A Christmas Carol* is, we all relate to Ebenezer Scrooge. Can I ask you a question? Have you ever grown disillusioned?

**Jesus came to save us from disillusionment.** Jesus came to remind us that there is more to this world, than this world itself. The next time you feel disillusioned, remember this. The God of the universe, who created this entire world out of nothing, knows your name. When you are at your lowest, listen for God. He is calling your name

to remind you that you are a person of significance. How important are you? You are so important, God sent his one and only son into this world to die for you, so God can spend eternity with you. Jesus came to save us from our disillusionment. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Jesus came to save us from our disillusionment, but Jesus also came to save us from defeat.

In 1939, a man by the name of Robert May worked for Montgomery Ward department store. For marketing purposes, he was asked to create a new Christmas character. So, he combined two famous characters, Santa Claus and the Ugly Duckling. He called his new character Rudolph, the Red Nosed Reindeer. You know this story too. The misfit reindeer goes on to save the day. Except for a few "Bah Humbug" people, everybody loves the story of Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer because everybody can relate to Rudolph. We all dream of being the hero. Let me tell you another story.

In 1960, Wilma Rudolph became the first American woman to win three gold medals in the Olympic Games. Millions of Americans were glued to their television sets that summer. They believed she was the greatest female athlete ever. What made Wilma Rudolph resonate with so many, was her personal story. For the first three years of her life, she couldn't walk and wore heavy braces. The reason was, her left leg was paralyzed. Medical experts said, she had no hope of ever walking, but Wilma didn't listen to the experts. She listened to her heart. She worked those long legs in Clarksville, Tennessee, and beat the odds. She became the fastest woman in the world!

**Jesus came to save us from defeat.** I am not going to lie to you this evening. I have known many good people who have lost. However, I will say this: The nativity stands as a reminder to the fact that God came into the world to stand with us. Jesus was not born in the palace surrounded by aristocrats. He was born in a barn surrounded by commoners, like us. Sometimes, we experience victory, and sometimes, we do not. As Christian people, we know the truth. God is always by our side, and in the end, we are going to be victorious. In the end, everyone who believes in Jesus is going to heaven. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Jesus came to save us from our disillusionment. Jesus came to save us from defeat. Finally, Jesus came to save us from death.

It has been said, "*Death is not extinguishing the light from the Christian; it is putting out the lamp before the dawn.*" When I first read that quote, I thought of my grandfather, Roger Adams. He was the greatest man I have ever known. He had the ability to make any situation fun. He had the gift of making everyone in his life feel important and special. This is his story. He was born in Pierpont, Ohio, just south of Conneaut. As a teenager, his leg was damaged in a train accident. His father, my great-grandfather, refused to let the doctor take his leg. Grandpa had his leg, but he always struggled with that bad leg. Maybe that is why he was the first Adams to leave the farm and head to the big city. He moved to the bright lights of Ashtabula. He had many jobs in his life, but the only job I remember him holding was on the docks of Ashtabula

harbor. It was a good job, but it was not the job he really wanted. He wanted to go into the ministry, but he never had the opportunity. When I went into the ministry, I wasn't just fulfilling my dream. I was fulfilling his dream of ministry too. In the twelfth chapter of Hebrews, it says we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, saints, who are cheering us on to do our best. One of those saints cheering me on this evening is my grandfather, Roger Adams. When I see him again in heaven, I am going to tell him everything he missed in the ministry. I am going to tell him I was passionate about the ministry because I did it for the two of us. The Ecology Global Network tells us that two people in our world die every second. You must know someone in that great cloud. There must be someone you miss this evening. There must be someone you will never forget.

**Jesus came to save us from death.** I have many questions, but there is one thing I know for sure. Someday, I am going to heaven. I am not making this statement because I think I am a good person or a perfect person. I know, I lean heavily on grace. I am going to heaven because I worship a perfect Savior. I am going to heaven because of Jesus, who was the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. May we never forget it. We are saved by grace and by grace alone. The fires of hell are waiting for you, if you believe you can earn your own salvation. Salvation is a gift! Salvation is yours by accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior. When I get to heaven, I am going to look for Roger Adams, the greatest man I have ever known. Who are you going to look for when you get to heaven? And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" I began this sermon series with a Wright brother's story. Let me end it with one.

On December 17, 1903, in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, after many attempts, Orville and Wilber Wright got their flying machine off the ground. Orville was the pilot. He flew for 12 seconds and went 120 feet. The world would never be the same again. How many of you flew home for Christmas? Wanting to share their good news, the Wright brothers telegraphed their sister, Katherine, back in Dayton, this simple message: WE HAVE ACTUALLY FLOWN 120 FEET. WE WILL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS. Katherine was thrilled her brothers had flown and wanted to share that good news with the world. She went to the editor of the local newspaper and handed him the message. He read it and responded, "How nice! The boys will be home for Christmas." He totally missed the big news!

I hope you don't miss the big news. The Savior of the world is born! He came to save us from our own disillusionment. He came to save us from defeat. He came to save us from death. Do you remember the words of the unnamed angel in the first chapter of Matthew? The angel said, "*She will give birth to a son, and you will give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" May God bless you on this sacred eve!