

Celebrate the Gift of Jesus Luke 2:1-15 Christmas Eve, 2008

Video: “Why Do We Celebrate Christmas?”

We do have a lot of different reasons for celebrating Christmas. We are not all here for the same reason tonight. But we are all here to celebrate Christmas. The Good News of Christmas is that God has a gift for you and me and all people. In the next few minutes I want to talk with you about that gift.

In the next 24 hours we will be opening our Christmas gifts. Some gifts are more expensive than others. Some gifts are more thoughtful than other. Some gifts are even harder to find than others. God gift of His Son is Priceless. After Jesus was born, an angel of the Lord announced His birth to the Bethlehem Shepherds with these words, ***“I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.”*** (Luke 2:10-12 NLT)

The gift of Jesus is Good News that God loves us. A lot of people are afraid of God. They think God is watching them, waiting for an opportunity to pounce on them for everything that they do that is wrong. So they are afraid of God and try to hide from Him. But the truth is God loves us. He hates sin and what it has done to us; so He wants to rescue us and restore us to His family.

God shows His love for us by coming to us. Sometimes we avoid people that we don’t like or that we have had an argument with. Not God. God came into our world that first Christmas. Jesus is the Immanuel, God with us. God is with us in the person of His Son who knows all of the hardships and struggles of life. God promises that nothing can separate us from His love.

More than that, God is for us. While other people may attack us or our guilty conscious accuse us, God is for us. You can’t make God stop loving you. God is with us regardless of how we feel, regardless of what we are facing. God loves us so much that Jesus stretched out His arms on the cross for us. We can’t buy that kind of love. We can’t earn God’s love. John 3:17 tells us, ***“God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.”*** God’s gift to us in Jesus is priceless.

Most of the Christmas gifts that we give or receive don’t last. “The Grinch” told the people of “Whoville” that their Christmas presents eventually ended up with him in the city dump. Can you remember what you got lost Christmas? Our gifts don’t last. But God’s gift last forever.

God’s gift last because He delivers us from sin and death. He gets us out of the mess we are in. The problem is that our sin and selfishness cut us off from God. We are all guilty. We’ve all

created problems for ourselves. But Jesus came to set us free from sin and guilt, from resentment and shame, from fear and death. He is the Savior who rescues us from all of these things. 2 Corinthians 5:19 tells us, ***“For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them.”***

Sin kills. Jesus gives life. This is a new life filled with God’s love and grace. It is a new life of service to God and others in His name. It is a response to the God who loves us. But there is only one way to receive this gift, and it is a gift. It is God’s love in action for us, love that brought Jesus to a manger and nailed Him to a cross. The only way to receive this gift is through faith, by trusting in God’s promises, by believing that Jesus is your Lord and Savior.

We’ve all received gifts that just aren’t practical. Either we have no idea what they are or what to do with them. Some of those gifts end up under the counter, in the basement or garage. Others we regift so that someone else has the problem of deciding what to do with them. But God’s gift is practical. We need it and can use it every day.

The gift is peace with God. The shepherds hear the choir of angels sing, ***“Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”*** (Luke 2:14) The Prophet Isaiah calls Jesus “The Prince of Peace.” Jesus gives us peace by tearing down the wall of guilt and shame that make us hide from God. Jesus gives us peace by filling us with His love and removing our fear. When we have the peace of God, we can bring all of our cares and concerns to Him.

Jesus also gives us peace with others. Life can be hard at times. Sometimes we do or say things that hurt the people around us, the people that we love. God’s gift makes it possible for us to continue to love and forgive one another. God’s gift also makes it possible for us to ask others to forgive us when we hurt them or offend them. That love and forgiveness we share in the Lord makes it possible for us to live at Peace with one another. Jesus said, ***“God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.”*** (Matthew 5:9 NLT) When we have peace with God, when we have peace with others, then we can have peace of mind. It is the gift that God gives by restoring us to a right relationship with Him and with the people around us.

The birth of Jesus transformed the world. Jesus has the power to transform our lives. Jesus is God’s gift to you. The name Jesus means God saves. He doesn’t want to give us a new religion; He wants to restore us to a right relationship with Him. So unwrap the gift God is giving you today. Receive it in faith and trust in Jesus as your Lord in the New Year. Remember what Jesus said, ***“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”*** (John 3:16 NLT) Amen.