

Written Copy: Luke 2:10-14 "Unwrapping the Greatest Present"

Christmas Eve

Wednesday, December 24th, 2025

Text: Luke 2:10-14

¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

Exegetical Statement

Luke presents the true story of God's greatest gift to mankind, the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He was born according to prophetic fulfillment in Bethlehem, the City of David as the One promised to David who would rule over a kingdom that would have no end. But He came not with the pomp and circumstance one would expect would accompany the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He was born not in a palace, but where animals were kept because there was no room for Him or mom and dad in the normal lodging places for humans. He was laid not in a royal chamber bed but in a feeding trough for animals. His birth was announced not by royal messengers but by angels from heaven who appeared in the glory of God to lowly shepherds who themselves were not in a palace or home, but out in the field, fulfilling the vocation King David once held. The angel assured them they need not be afraid for he was sent to proclaim Good News of great joy meant for all people, because the Savior, who is the Anointed One, the Messiah, who is also the Lord God has finally come. Then a great assembly gives celebration for this fulfillment of God's promised plan of salvation offer praise and worship before the shepherds. After they depart, the shepherds follow the angel's directives, find this special Child along with Mary and Joseph, and relay to them and to all they encounter what the angels told them. All who heard were astonished. Yet Mary kept all that she had seen and heard to herself, pondering it in her heart.

Focus Statement:

The child born to the Virgin Mary on Christmas is the gift that makes any and all worthy to receive Him by faith. He came to a sin darkened world to be the light of salvation from God for all men through His life, death, and resurrection. He is given by the Holy Spirit working in the Gospel Message presented through the means of grace. He comes to change hearts and minds by cancelling our debt of sin and restoring a relationship of love and peace with our God, and with one another that continues to be opened and unpacked now as we grow in knowledge and faith in Him, to be completely unwrapped for us on Resurrection Day.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

This child is the gift no one asked for, and all are unworthy to receive because our hearts are focused on ourselves and lack true love, care, and compassion for others, putting ourselves first and God second.

What the hearer should do as a result:

As we see the presents under the tree, open ours and watch others do the same, remember the Greatest Gift of God's Son that is being unwrapped before us as we live out our faith relationship in Christ.

Subject Sentence: Christ is the Christmas Gift for all unwrapped by faith

Introduction: The Toil of Buying and Wrapping Presents

Here we are, after 3PM on Christmas Eve. I would imagine since you are here you have all your Christmas Shopping done. Is anybody planning on going out to get last minute gifts after worship? If so, we should gather around you, lay hands on you, and pray for you!

How was your Christmas shopping experience this year? How many shopped online for almost all your gifts? How many of you had to brave the stores the last week before Christmas? I myself am thankful for Amazon and for other online ordering and delivery services so I could avoid something like this: [*show "Jingle All the Way Trailer"*].

Did you ever stop and wonder why we go through all this work and toil on Christmas? Why do we secretly guess what our loved ones might need only to buy them something that doesn't fit, isn't what they really needed or wanted, that they now will have to go out and return the day after Christmas? Why we spend time and energy beautifully wrapping our gifts, or paying someone else to wrap them only to see our work ripped apart and thrown away immediately after we put it in their hands? We can give gift cards and avoid the hassle of shopping and wrapping, but it's just not the same as seeing the gift sitting in the person's lap. With gift cards we are actually making the person we are gifting them to go do the work of shopping for it. And whoever came up with the idea of Christmas morning being happy and peaceful is someone who has not done Christmas with small children!

The History of Gift-Giving on Christmas

So, how did this tradition of exchanging presents on Christmas morning come into being? It seems to have its roots in ancient Rome before the birth of Christ during the festival to honor the Roman God Saturn. It was celebrated during around the time of the Winter Solstice from December 17th-23rd with sacrifices to the god, public banquets, merrymaking (or as we might say: 'partying') and private gift giving.

But as Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire and people began to worship Jesus instead of the false Roman god Saturn, gift giving at the Winter Solstice became associated with the Magi bringing gifts to the Christ child.

Some early Christian rulers interpreted the Magi's gift giving to King Jesus to mean that their subjects should be buying them gifts. But this changed with the popularity of the poem about a Bohemian Duke named Wencelas (921 AD-935 AD) who, as legend has it, braved harsh winter weather to deliver alms to the poor peasants. He was murdered by his brother. But because of his faith, and his Christ-like actions, the Holy Roman Emperor gave him the title "King" after his death.

Then in the 4th Century there was a Greek Christian bishop by the name of Saint Nicholas who served in what is now modern-day Turkey. He was known for his work of distributing wealth and benevolent help to the poor but doing so secretly so that no one knew where the gift came from. Legend has it that he would secretly place gold coins under windows and doors in houses where children had been trapped and enslaved so that the father could afford to buy them back.

During the Middle Ages this story about Saint Nicholas inspired a Dutch/Belgian legend involving a mythical character named “Sinterklaas”: a tall, elderly man with a white beard who wore a red bishop’s cape and hat. He rode in on a white horse along with helpers who distributed gifts and provisions for the poor. The Dutch settlers who reached America brought this tradition with them which eventually developed into our beloved Santa Claus who delivered presents not on horseback but a sleigh.

Gift exchanges used to take place around December 6th which is St. Nicholas Festival Day. But the growing popularity of the poem “The Night Before Christmas” written in 1823, as well as the novella “A Christmas Carol” written in 1843 influenced the change to exchanging gifts on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

How We Should See Christ in Unwrapping Presents

While Christmas gift exchange certainly had its origins in the story of the Magi and the selfless works of Church Fathers, how should we see Jesus in the tradition of giving and unwrapping presents today? As announced by the angels to the shepherds long ago, the gift of the Christ Child is the “**Good News of great joy**” that is for all people. But if you were to have just come upon Mary and Joseph and this child lying in a feeding trough, without hearing the angelic announcement,, what would you think? Would you see Him as anything extraordinary, or rather just an ordinary child born into poverty? This gift of God at Christmas is a lot like an expensive gift wrapped in ordinary wrapping paper; there’s more there than meets the eye. It’s like the present you unwrap, only to find another wrapped box inside of another wrapped box inside of another. Rather than rip all the wrapping paper off at once let’s slow down and take a meditative look at the gift that is this child lying in a feeding trough.

The First Box: Given to All, Especially the Unworthy

We open the first box and contemplate who this gift was given to. In our tradition of Santa Claus giving gifts only to the good children, and those who are naughty receiving coal comes to mind. When we shop for gifts don’t we spend more money on our family and those that we love rather than others who are just acquaintances. Only in special circumstances do we buy gifts for those who don’t know us.

The Christ child is the gift given to all men and women. He was God's precious gift given not just to those who knew God or kept His commandments. He is the gift given to those who deserve to be on the naughty list.

Titus 3:2-3 ² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. ³ For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

Paul, in his letter to Titus, describes how all people, including you and me deserve to be on the naughty list. How often do you say evil things or think evil about others, focusing on their bad qualities, some of which we share, without a consideration of their good qualities or their struggles in life? How often are we ready to quarrel with others instead of being gentle, showing courtesy, and cutting them some slack since they are dealing with problems just like we are? How often are we ruled by our passions, our desires, our anger, our failure to love others instead of obeying God's call to love and forgive?

Yet it is to you and to me that God gave the gift of His Son on Christmas night. It is His gift of love for the unlovely, His gift for every man, woman, and child in the world.

Unwrapping the Second Box

Now let's unwrap the 2nd box. At first glance many would see this gift of Baby Jesus as being nothing special. It's a cute story to recite to kids at Christmas time just like Santa Claus and Frosty the Snowman. It's just part of the tradition growing up to go to Church on Christmas Eve. But for many these days that tradition seems to be fading away.

But this gift is far from ordinary. We should see it the way all those who heard the shepherd's testimony saw Him, as something extraordinary, miraculous, out of this world, a once in a lifetime occurrence. This is God Himself, the Creator God who exists into eternity past before anything existed, who Created all things by His Word of Command, coming down and joining Himself with humanity in this child born of the Virgin Mary. This is the Holy God cloaking Himself in humanity so that He could live alongside mankind, living the same life you and I live, but doing it in perfect obedience to God the Father. This is God the Son coming to live amongst our darkness and sinfulness out of the greatest love for all mankind, out of the greatest love for you.

Unwrapping the Third Box

Let's unwrap the 3rd box and take a closer look at what this gift should mean for you and for me. Try as hard as they might, sometimes our loved ones give us "ho-hum" gifts that are really not that special. We get another flashy weird tie that we will probably never wear, clothes and shoes that don't fit either our size or style, tools or kitchen implements that we already have and are better quality, coffee cups for those that already have a cupboard full. And then there are those gifts you can only say to yourself, "What on earth were they thinking?"

But the gift of the Christ Child is the most precious and useful gift you can ever receive. It is the gift from God given to change you. This child came to change who you are deep down and personally. He came to change you from one who deserves to be on the naughty list to one who is declared to be God's precious and beloved child worthy of life in His household of faith now and for eternity.

He is God the Son who out of the greatest love for you became man so that He might live the perfect life you never could, perfectly obeying the Heavenly Father every day and hour of His life by loving others and putting their needs before His own. He was kind and loving even and especially to those who were not. Then He took that perfect life of His and gave it up by becoming the atoning sacrifice for your sins, for all the reasons you are on the naughty list. He suffered and died to remove you from that naughty list and gives you His perfect life, so you are worthy to be added to the list that contains all the precious children of the Heavenly Father.

All this is given to you as God's free gift of love and grace, not under the tree at Christmas, but at the baptismal font through the Holy Spirit working in the Gospel. It is being given to you now through the Word preached and through the Sacrament of the Altar. With it comes the power to have and hold Him now and every day of your life, the power that is faith worked in your heart and life and kept alive by the continued work of the Spirit.

Unwrapping the Fourth Box: Peace Eternal

Now let's unwrap the final box. What do we have here as we hold the Christ Child as our Lord and Savior? We are given peace. It's the greatest kind of peace, the kind we call "***The Peace that passes all understanding***". It's greater than any kind of peace we can manufacture within ourselves because it comes not from us but from God through the gift of this child, our Savior. It is the sure and certain knowledge that we live in peace with God Almighty, ruler of Heaven and Earth. It's the peace knowing He always has our back, is on our side, working for our good in all things. It's the peace that comes from knowing that even when we turn away from Him in sin, He will not turn away from us. He reaches out and calls us back, forgives us, and restores us, all because of the greatest love He has for you and me. It's the peace we have now, only in part, but will enjoy in full strength with Him and with one another in eternal life to come.

Conclusion: Unwrapping the Greatest Present Ever

Well, I hope and pray I've started you on your journey of unwrapping this greatest present you will ever receive, the present that is the gift of God the Son born as the baby Jesus on Christmas day. Although we've unwrapped four boxes you're not done yet. The gift of Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior is not something you can unwrap during a Christmas Eve Sermon. He is the gift that takes a lifetime to unwrap, to get to know, learn about, and treasure. Through the work of the Holy Spirit every time you study His word, participate in Worship, receive the Lord's Supper the Holy Spirit is at work unwrapping this gift more and more, drawing you closer and closer to Him, and preparing you for Resurrection Day when you will see Him as He truly is and live with Him in all His glory. Things to consider as you unwrap your presents and watch others do so, and perhaps things to share with others if the Lord gives you opportunity to. Amen.