

5 - Behold a Savior is Born
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GFC - December 24, 2023

Have you ever thought of what it would be like if God were buying your Christmas presents? I mean, it's one thing to get presents from friends and family – that's all good – but to get presents from God Himself would be pretty incredible.

Well – here's the thing – God has given Christmas presents to us already. He's given us joy, peace, hope, and love. But the greatest gift of all is the gift of salvation through faith in Jesus. That's why my sermon is called Behold a Savior is Born.

We get that title from what the angels told the shepherds in Luke 2:8-14

There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests."

The Christmas story is one of the most familiar stories on earth. On the surface, it seems so simple – a poor couple in ancient Israel traveled to their hometown because of a census. A Roman census required everyone to go to their hometown to register. Luke 2:1-5 says:

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. And everyone went to his own town to register. 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. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

Because of that census, every room in the town was taken and there was no room for Mary and Joseph so the innkeeper let them stay in his stable. Luke 2:6-7 says:

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

That's an interesting story – but if that was all that happened – we would not be talking about it today. But this was the most incredible birth ever in history. Why is it so incredible? Because on this night God entered the world as a baby. While most of the people in the world went about their business unaware, God became a man so He could be the Savior of the world.

That's amazing! Not only is the Christmas story amazing, but the stories of many of the traditions we celebrate at Christmas are also amazing because they are all about Jesus and the gifts He gave us.

I want to talk about some of those Christmas traditions today. Traditions are customs that are handed down from generation to generation. Most families have Christmas traditions. When we open our presents, how we decorate our trees, when and what we eat.

Most Christmas traditions are not biblical – by that I mean the Bible does not say we must celebrate Christmas this way. In fact, celebrating Christmas is not mentioned in the Bible at all. But celebrating Christmas is okay for us because God is a God of celebration and the people of God in the Bible celebrated big events.

The word holiday actually means holy day and the word Christmas means Christ's Mass – which is a church service celebrating the birth of Christ like we are doing today.

Did you know that celebrating Christmas is a relatively recent tradition? For the church's first three centuries, Christmas wasn't in December—or on the calendar at all. I know we think of Mary and Joseph trudging to Bethlehem in the middle of winter, but we really don't know when Jesus Christ was born.

The eventual choice of Dec. 25 was made in the 3rd century to replace pagan festivals that celebrated the winter solstice. Pagans are people who do not believe in Jesus, but they either worship many gods or they worship nature.

It was not until the 1800's that Christmas began to be celebrated as we know it – with church services and gift giving and the singing of carols.

There are many Christmas traditions and some people don't know that they're all about Jesus and the gifts He gives. For instance:

Did you know that Christmas Trees and Lights are about Jesus?

The evergreen tree is a very big part of the Christmas holiday. This tradition dates a thousand years to Scandinavia. The people there endured harsh winters where all trees seemed to die, except for evergreen trees. The Vikings thought these trees had some kind of supernatural power because they stayed alive even in the dead of winter. So, they began the tradition of chopping down evergreen trees and

bringing them into their homes in the winter. They did it because they thought this brought them life and good fortune.

Many Christian leaders were against Christmas trees because of the pagan origins. It took one of the greatest Christian leaders in history to change that.

Martin Luther led what is called the Great Reformation in the 1500's. At that time, most people believed they had to work for their salvation. He showed us that salvation is actually by grace through faith in Jesus.

One night Martin Luther was walking home on a dark December evening when he saw the beauty of the starlight coming through the branches of the evergreens around his home. He was so captivated by this, that he put an evergreen in his home and tied candles to it.

So, the great Reformer started the tradition of lighted Christmas trees. Luther taught that the tree represented the love of God. The evergreen's color does not fade, just like God's love never fades. The lights represented the hope that Christ brought into the world.

The Bible says that Jesus is the light of the world. So – when you look at the Christmas tree – think of the love that God has for you that caused Him to send Jesus to light the way to eternal life.

Did you know Christmas Wreaths are about Jesus?

Wreaths are made of evergreens such as pine branches or holly. Remember, that is a symbol of the life Christ gives to us. The circular shape of a wreath can represent eternity because a circle has no beginning or end – just like God. So, wreaths remind us of the eternal life we have by trusting in Jesus.

Did you know the Candy Cane is about Jesus?

The white represents the sinless life of Christ and it represents that when we are saved, Jesus washes away our sins and makes us clean. The red represents the blood of Christ shed on the cross. And the curve on the end represents the J for Jesus and the long sticks with curved ends that shepherds used to lead their sheep.

So every time you enjoy a candy cane – let it remind you of what Jesus did for you at Christmas time and at the cross. And let it remind you that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who leads us, watches over us and protects us.

Did you know that Christmas Colors point to Jesus?

Green, red and gold are the traditional colors of Christmas. The first color associated with Christmas was green. Green has always been a symbol of life.

Remember I told you how people in ancient times were fascinated by the trees and plants that stayed green in the winter. So, green represents eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Red symbolizes the power of the blood of Christ to give us eternal life. Gold symbolizes the gifts the wise men brought to the baby Jesus. It also symbolized the star that guided them to Christ in Bethlehem.

Did you know that Christmas Presents also speak of Jesus?

The origins of this Christmas tradition are found in Matthew 2:1-11

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." ...the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.

When they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, they fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

For many years, people did not give presents to each other at Christmas. They felt that God did not want His Son's birthday to be a time of giving to anyone but Christ. But over time, people began to see that the spirit of Christmas is giving. We are never more like Jesus than when we give. So now we give to the Lord and we give to each other.

Unfortunately, many people today have forgotten the true reason for the Christmas season. It's come to be a hectic holiday of shopping in order to give gifts to each other. Now there's nothing wrong with giving to each other, but we must remember the reason behind this season. As we read in Matthew 1:21-23

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel"- which means, "God with us."

This is what we call the good news! Jesus came to save us from our sins and to be God with us. It's hard to understand why Jesus left heaven to become a baby in a manger. But we need to understand why He did it. The whole point of the baby's birth is this: We were created for relationship with God but sin broke that relationship.

Sin means to do something wrong. To disobey God. Some wrongs things we do are when we disobey our parents or when we tell a lie or when we mistreat our

brothers or sisters. Those sins cause us to be separated from God. But Jesus came to save us from our sins and make a way for us back to God. That's the story of the Bible - that God loves you so much and He wants relationship with you so much that He sent His only begotten Son to become a man in order to die for the sins of the world.

The most famous verse in the Bible, John 3:16, says:

God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

That's the good news. God so loved the world – including you – that He sent Jesus. Christmas is God saying very clearly to you, “I love you.”

To make it even clearer, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ to earth as a human baby. But Jesus did not stay a baby in a manger. He became a man who paid the price for every sin we would ever commit. He did that by dying on a cross and He proved it was true by coming back to life! This is the good news of why the Savior was born.

And the good news is that God's love for you never changes. He loves you on your good days as much as your bad days. He loves you when you feel it, and He loves you when you don't feel it. He loves you when you think you deserve it, and He loves you when you don't deserve it.

The Bible says that every good gift in our lives comes from God. He might use other people to get the gift to you, but He is the giver.

Jesus Christ is God's Christmas gift to us. Yet, some of us have gone Christmas after Christmas and never opened the biggest gift under the tree – the gift of salvation.

Not only does God want to give you gifts; He wants to make the most amazing exchange of gifts you could ever imagine.

You might think, what can I give to God? Well, I'll tell you.
 Christmas is Jesus Christ saying to you:
 Give me your sin and I'll give you salvation.
 Give me your empty heart and I'll give you meaning and purpose.
 Give me your worry and I'll give you peace.
 Give me your fear and I'll give you faith.
 Give me your depression and I'll give you joy.
 Give me your discouragement and I'll give you hope.
 Give me your guilt and condemnation and I'll give you forgiveness.

Don't miss the purpose of Christmas.

It's not about what's under the tree. It's about the man who hung on the cross.
It's not about having a vacation. It's about having salvation.
It's not about Jingle Bells – it's about the angels' Noels.
It's not about Father Christmas – it's about Father God.
Christmas is not about Jack Frost – it's about Jesus saving the lost!

It's not about Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer – it's about Jesus and His red-stained cross.
It's not about the Grinch who Stole Christmas – it's about the Christ who gave Christmas.
It's not about Frosty the Snowman – it's about Jesus making you a new man.

It's not just about the gifts we give each other – it's about the gift God gave us.
Don't miss the greatest gift you can ever receive.

In history's greatest miracle, God became a human being. The King of King and the Lord of Lords chose birth in a stable and death on a cross so He could give us gifts from God.

That's why we celebrate Christmas: Jesus came to earth to die for our sins and give us His gift of eternal life and relationship with God. And as a result of receiving Jesus – you receive peace, joy and love!

Have you ever received Jesus as your Savior and Lord? Romans 10:9 says:

If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Receiving Jesus Christ as your Savior is the greatest gift ever!