

Sermon Series – Some Gifts are More than Just a Gift.

#3 – How do you Wrap a Gift that is More than Just a Gift?

Luke 2:1-12

INTRO: Let's get right to our scripture today in the book of Luke, chapter 2: ***"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. 2(And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) 3And all went to be taxed, everyone into his own city. 4And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) 5to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. 6And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. 7And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.***

*And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. 10And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. 12And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." (KJV) **PRAY***

What is wrong with this picture? Is it just me or have you ever wondered why Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God is born in a stable, wrapped in pieces of cloth, lying in an animal's feeding trough?

QUOTE: In Fulton J. Sheen's old book called "Life of Christ", he says, **"In the filthiest place in the world, a stable, purity was born. He who would call Himself 'the Living Bread' descended from Heaven and was laid in a manger, literally, a place for the animals to eat. There was no room in the inn but there was room in the stable. The stable would be the last place in the world where one would have looked for Him. But Divinity is always where one least expects to find it. No worldly mind would have suspected that the eternal Word would be an infant and the omnipotence would be wrapped in swaddling clothes and salvation would lie in a manger. No one would ever have suspected that God, coming to this earth would ever be so helpless.**

And that is why so many miss Him. Divinity is always where one least expects to find it.

"The Son of God was laid in a stranger's stable in the beginning and a stranger's grave at the end. An ox and an ass surrounded His crib at Bethlehem and two thieves were on either side of his cross on Calvary. He was wrapped in strips of cloths in His birthplace. He was wrapped in grave cloths in His tomb.

The shepherds watched their flocks nearby and were told by the angels, "This is a sign by which you will know Him. You will find the child in" swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." He was already at birth bearing His cross. The only cross a baby could bear, a cross of poverty, exile, and limitation."

From a human point of view, nothing in this picture looks right. Jesus deserved better; God could have done better. **So...Why does God allow it?**

If we believe in the sovereignty of God, then we must believe that God did not simply "allow" his Son to be born this way; we must believe that God "ordained" it. There was no room in the inn because God wanted it that way.

In his sermon on this text, the great preacher Charles Spurgeon offers several answers to this question.

First, Christ was born like this to show his **humiliation**.

Second, he was born like this because he was the **King of the Poor**. The only invited guests to witness this birth were poor shepherds.

Third, the very manner of his birth—no room in the inn, born in a stable, wrapped in rags and laid in a manger—**was an invitation to the rejected, the abused, the mistreated, the forgotten, the overlooked, to come to Him.**

The angel speaks of "***the sign***" in verse 12, so the shepherds will know how to find this newborn savior. He uses a word that generally refers to a supernatural sign from God that no one could miss. Like parting of the Red Sea, healing the sick, or walking on water.

The angel says, ***“This will be the sign.”*** You will find a baby wrapped in ***“swaddling clothes”*** and lying in a manger. The bible says that the Jews were looking for a Messiah. But no one was expecting a baby in a manger.

So, throughout history, trying to understand the divinity of Jesus, artists have put a halo around Mary & Joseph, so we would recognize them.

But the bible says in Luke 2 ***“they had no halos.”*** That’s what it means when it says, ***“There was no room for them in the inn.”*** In other words, to the innkeeper this was just another poor young Jewish guy with his pregnant teenage Jewish wife, riding a Jewish donkey, looking for a room.

If Mary and Joseph would have had halos, you get them a room. You go down to room 7 and say, “hey dude you’re out, we’ve got a couple here with halos.”

Most people read Luke 2:7, and remember it as, ***“because there was no room for Jesus in the inn.”*** But that’s not what the bible says. Luke says, ***“there was no room for them in the inn.”*** There was no room for Mary or Joseph. What happened to Jesus happened to them. Many years later Jesus challenged his disciples this way: ***“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”*** (Mark 8:34).

I like how verse 7 in the King James says, ***“wrapped in swaddling clothes,”*** which meant “strips of cloth” or “rags.” Swaddling clothes” sounds more fashionable don’t you think? Like something you would buy from Carter’s or Baby’s R Us.

Jesus is God’s indescribable gift, and yet He’s wrapped in strips of cloth. It made me think about gift wrapping. I’m not that great at, like my wife is.

There are some gifts that have the anticipation heightened by the wrapping. Some people put one box inside another box after another, each one carefully wrapped to bring you from one massive gift down to a Bailey’s box with a ring. And some gifts you cannot hide even though you wrapped them carefully.

The title for today’s message is: How Do You Wrap a Gift that is More Than Just a Gift?

As I mentioned, the Mary wrapped baby Jesus in strips of cloth, but what does the bible tells us about how God wrapped Jesus?

1. Jesus was wrapped in PROPHECY. God doesn't just suddenly drop Jesus Christ out of heaven to earth. I mean He prepared us for His coming hundreds of years ahead of time.

One scholar, J. Barton Payne, has found as many as 574 verses in the Old Testament that somehow point to or describe or reference the coming Messiah. Alfred Edersheim found 456 Old Testament verses referring to the Messiah or His times. Conservatively, Jesus fulfilled at least 300 prophecies in His earthly ministry.

Professor Peter W. Stoner states that the probability of just eight of these prophecies being fulfilled in one person is 1 in 10 to the 17th power. That's one in 10 with 17 zero's after it.

When you wrap God's indescribable gift in something as powerful as prophecy, you have people anticipating and looking for His arrival. For instance:

Isaiah 7:14 " Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel." (NIV)

Isaiah 9:6-7: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this."

Don't forget Isaiah 11:1-5, ***"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. 2The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—3and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes or decide by what he hears with his ears; 4but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips, he will slay the wicked. 5Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist."***

Righteousness will be his belt. Faithfulness will be about his waist. Here we have a gift that comes through the womb of the Virgin Mary, but we know

about it ahead of time, because the prophet said, "***Righteousness will mark his life. He will judge the poor and the rich alike with fairness.***"

You prepare the heart of people for an indescribable gift by wrapping him in the prophecy of Micah 5:2: "***2'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.***" (NIV)

No one fits these descriptions except the indescribable Gift of God's Son, Jesus the Messiah.

2. Jesus was wrapped in HISTORY. Prophecy, being what it is, must have its way woven into history at some point, and that's God's job.

Galatians 4:4-5; "***But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.*** (NIV)

King James says, "***fullness of the time***" the NIV says, "***when the set time had fully come.***" It means exactly on schedule, precisely as it could have been and at no better time would it occur. When all the things seemed to fit perfectly together for His coming, a baby began to be formed in Mary's womb. You wrap this gift in history.

You must understand that people didn't have a common language since Babel. The world was filled with multiple languages. There was no linguistic means that could be spoken from one place and understood at another. And so, there came along a man named Alexander the Great who formulated a language that became common, *koine* Greek.

Well, if you've got a language and if you've got a message to convey, you need roads to travel on to get the message out. And history tells us Rome built the roads that tied east with west, that's part of the fullness of the time.

But what about the politics of those days? Well, you had a very unusual situation. You had a census that required a man who found his roots down in Bethlehem to go there. And it so happened this man had been engaged to this woman, and they made that little trek down to Bethlehem right about the time her baby was to be born. That's how you wrap an indescribable gift. You wrap Him in undeniable history.

The Bible makes it clear, and history verifies that Jesus came in the fullness of time, and everything was as fully prepared for Him as possible. God's preparation was staggering. You wrap an indescribable gift in prophecy and in history and you bring Him at just the right time.

You have prophetic words from Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Zechariah and from Malachi and a host of others, saying, "Messiah's coming; be ready."

At the same time, history is unfolding. The Roman world comes into power and Israel is overcome and oppressed. And the people anticipate that the Messiah will come in bright, shining armor on a white horse to overthrow Rome like King David did to the Philistines. It didn't happen just like that. Why?

3. Jesus was wrapped in MYSTERY. What's the mystery about that baby? I can think of a couple of things.

First, the mystery of **His Humanity**—"**You will find a baby.**" This tells us that Christ came into the world just like us. Even though we often speak of the virgin birth, it should be remembered that the real miracle occurred at conception. Jesus' physical birth was like any other baby's birth.

Although he was fully and truly God from all eternity, the Son of God took on humanity when he was conceived in Mary's womb and born in Bethlehem. God entered human history to provide for our salvation. Everything else flows from this truth. If he had not been born, he could not have died for our sins. And he could not have risen from the dead. He had to become like us to save us.

Secondly, the mystery of: **His Helplessness**—"**Wrapped in swaddling clothes.**"

In that day mothers would wrap the arms and legs and then wrap the torso until the baby looked like an Egyptian mummy. This reminds us that years later, when Jesus would stand before the Jewish authorities, bound like a common criminal. When falsely accused, he made no reply. It is no coincidence that he entered the world as he left it—bound and seemingly helpless.

Thirdly, the mystery of: **His Humility**—**"Lying in a manger."** The word means something like a feeding-trough. Even in his birth he was bearing the only cross a baby can bear—poverty and helplessness.

This is what Philippians 2:7 means when it says that Jesus ***"made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."***

Nothing about the infant Jesus appeared supernatural. There were no halos...If you had been there; you would have concluded that this was just another ordinary baby born to a poor young couple.

The book of John says, ***"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."*** God became man. The undiminished deity took upon himself perfect humanity. The two natures linked together in one person: the God-man, Jesus Christ. No less deity. No less humanity in one person, in one body. That is a mystery.

Did anyone ever say it any better than Charles Wesley? ***"Christ, by highest heavens adored, Christ the everlasting Lord! Late in time behold him come, offspring of the virgin's womb. Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity, pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel."***

Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes by his mother, but wonderfully packaged by God in history, in prophecy, and in mystery.

This is how God wrapped His gift. He's not a grown man; he's a little baby. He's not a knight in shining armor; he's a baby. Physically He's laid in a feeding trough, and wrapped in strips of cloth, but spiritually, He's wrapped in mystery and history and prophecy.

The angel speaking to the shepherds is interrupted by a heavenly host singing, ***"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom his favor rests."***

Look at what they did: ***"It came about when the angels had gone away to heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, 'Let's go straight to***

Bethlehem to see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.' "

There was no doubt. There was no unbelief. There was no mockery. There wasn't one of them who said, "I can't believe that. You guys go if you want to; I'm staying here with the sheep." They all went in haste. They found their way to Mary and Joseph and the baby as it lay in the manger. And when they had seen this, what did they say? They could only quote what they'd been told.

Verse 17, "When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them."

Conclusion: This gift was perfectly wrapped by God. But even if a gift is wrapped perfectly and has a fancy bow on top. What we all want is what's inside. And if you receive God's gift, you will find...

1) It's Personal

Aren't the best gifts personal? Something very special for the one you love.

Psalm 139 says: ***'Lord, you have searched me, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise. You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.'***

God knows us intimately. His gift wasn't a one-dimensional gift, which ended when Jesus died for our sins. The Bible tells us that Jesus rose from the dead and opened the way for us to live forever. When He returned to heaven, he sent His Spirit to live in anyone who would receive him. In giving us His Spirit, God has drawn us into intimacy with Himself. One of Jesus' titles is 'Emmanuel' which translates as 'God with us'— a gift that could not be more personal.

2) It's Practical

In the gift of Jesus, God gives us something we don't deserve, but something we desperately need. ***'For the wages of sin is death,' says the Bible, 'but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord'*** (Romans 6:23). God's practical gift to us, then, is forgiveness.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which literally means 'the House of Bread'. Later in his life, He spoke about himself saying, ***"I am the Bread of Life. Those who***

come to me will never go hungry, and those who believe in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35).

The book of John contains THE SEVEN “I AM” CLAIMS OF JESUS:

1. I am the bread of life.
2. I am the light of the world.
3. I am the door.
4. I am the good shepherd.
5. I am the resurrection and the life.
6. I am the way, the truth, and the life.
7. I am the vine.

God’s gift is personal. God’s gift is practical.

3) It’s a Permanent Gift

Sometimes, you can give children expensive toys, only to find, by the end of Christmas Day, that they prefer to play with the box. Sometimes, the presents we give don’t work, they break, or you forget to get batteries.

God’s gift to us is permanent, not perishable. John said: ***‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life’?***

Life without Christ is a hopeless end, but life with Christ is an endless hope.

So, God’s gift is personal – he gave us his son. It is practical, through the cleansing of our hearts and forgiveness of our sins. It is permanent, not perishable, and finally...

4) It’s a Purchased Gift

God’s gift to us was purchased. It’s free to us, but it didn’t come free – in fact, it came at a huge cost, and we should not cheapen it by regarding it lightly. God gave us his only Son. We couldn’t save ourselves, so Jesus came to rescue us.

Illustration: One Christmas a grandmother could not decide what gift to give her three grandchildren. She decided to simply put a check for \$20 in each card with the message ‘buy your own gift’. She sent out the cards, and then to her

surprise the woman found the checks under some newspapers – she had omitted to post them. So, her grandchildren were very perplexed to receive a card with no gift and the startling message “BUY YOUR OWN GIFT”.

God loved us so much that He spent everything He had on us in sending Jesus to die for our sins. If you haven't already, it's time you unwrap this indescribable gift and receive God's love.

STORY: In his book **Dare to Believe**, Dan Baumann illustrates what it is like to know that something is yours even though you must wait for it. You may even have it in hand but are not able to enjoy it just yet.

He says that when he was young, he always did a lot of snooping at Christmas time, trying to find his gift and figure out what was in the wrapped packages which his mom hid. One year he discovered a large package with his name on it that he knew was a set of golf clubs. One shake of that box revealed the unmistakable sound of clubs. He says, **“When Mom wasn't around, I would go and feel the package, shake it, and pretend that I was on the golf course. The point is, I was already enjoying the pleasures of a future event; namely, the unwrapped gift. It had my name on it. I knew what it was.”**

It was his, but it would not be handed over to him until Christmas morning. Then he would see with his eyes what before he had only seen with his heart.

Christmas means that God has given us the gift of himself. For some people it is still wrapped. But the package has your name on it. You can investigate His Word and know what awaits you. It is yours, BUT YOU CAN'T REALLY ENJOY IT UNTIL YOU UNWRAP IT.