

December 20, 2020 AM
Pastor Ken Hepner

“God’s Precious Gift of Salvation”
Luke 2:9 – 14

Introduction:

This morning as we turn our attention to the Word of the Lord, we are exploring the wonder of the first Christmas. The central theme of the Christmas story is the Lord God Almighty communicating His love for us and His desire to shower His mercy and grace upon us. That is what makes the Christmas story, the Advent, the coming of our Savior and Redeemer Jesus, such a beautiful and magnificent thing to think about!

As we think about the first Christmas, and as we celebrate the gift of God’s grace to us, it is important that we don’t get caught up in all the materialism and festivity of Christmas, missing what is really important. Our gift giving to one another can be very **Significant**, if we take the time to **Express** to the recipient the **Love** the gift represents in our hearts and minds to our loved ones.

We shouldn’t allow ourselves to fall into the trap of the commercialist; that trap being, expecting gifts we give to speak for us. If your gifts are motivated by your love and affection for someone, tell them what you feel about them and tell them why you feel the way you do about them. Speak to your loved ones in encouraging and uplifting ways!

The theme of gifts of love is exemplified in the lives of Mary and Joseph, as **they Gave Themselves to the Lord to be used as He saw fit.**

The theme of gifts of love is exemplified in the lives of the Wise Men whom the Lord God used “His star” they saw in their homeland, to draw them to seek Jesus. They knew this was a supernatural thing that was unfolding on the earth In Judea. These men represent us all. They had their hearts and minds stirred, convicted. They responded to that stirring conviction by seeking for Jesus. They encountered Jesus and they worshipped him by giving to his family three prophetic gifts:

- 1.) They gave Him **Gold** – a gift one gave to a newborn king, signifying He was born to reign on the earth, one day as King of kings and Lord of lords.
- 2.) They gave Him **Frankincense** – a gift one gave to a newborn male born to a family in line for the priesthood, signifying He would carry on a ministry of priesthood for us.
- 3.) They gave Him **Myrrh** – a gift one gave to a person’s family to prepare the body of a deceased person for burial, signifying that our Lord Jesus was born to die.

Celebrating Christmas this year by giving gifts to people has its origin in the Heart of God. Perhaps the clearest verse of Scripture about this is found in John’s gospel 3:16

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” In the coming of the Lord Jesus to earth we have the fullest expression of the giving heart of God to humanity.

II Corinthians 8:9 *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich.”*

II Corinthians 9:15 *“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”*

The Indescribable gift of God is our Redemption, that God the Son was born to die, to shed His precious blood for us to pay the penalty we owed. *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

Jesus paid the price to redeem us from **Sins** we have committed, as well as sins committed against us. Jesus paid the price to redeem us from **Self-Interest** in our hearts, which bend us away from even wanting to follow God’s will for our lives. Jesus paid the price to redeem us from **Satan’s Power**, schemes, wiles, temptations, and deception. Jesus paid the price to redeem us from **Death**.

The amazing thing, about this gift of salvation, is that **God not only gave us His Son’s sacrifice, but goes on to Express His love for us in Extending to us His grace and mercy!** He moves in the world today in the lives of His people, pouring out streams of grace and mercy on the earth. He moves people to prayer, teachers, and preachers to speak of His mercy, musicians to sing of His desires for us, and authors to write about the glorious Good News of Jesus.

This morning as we consider the precious gift of God’s salvation made available to each of us in Christ Jesus our Lord, return with me to the angel’s announcement of His Good News! Luke 2:9 – 14 *“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 ... a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.**’ ... 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.**’”*

I. Do Not Be Afraid:

The angel’s first word to the shepherds was a tremendous word that speaks profoundly to the human condition in every generation, *“Do not be afraid.”* In terms of our humanity fear is a God-given response to danger, which can save our lives. Fear releases adrenaline into our blood stream, causing us to take flight at danger, or to take other preventative measures.

But at deep, fundamental levels most of us have some kinds of fears that are a perversion of God-given capability of fear. Lots of people experience fear of the unknown, what the

future will hold for us. We have an innate human fear of death and suffering, fear of failure, fear of incapacitation or similar fears that all of us are subject to experience, simply because we are human beings.

Some of experience fears that absolutely defy logic, that are irrational and which make no sense whatsoever. These can be things like fear of the dark, fear of strangers or meeting new people, paranoia regarding some expected future disaster, and claustrophobia. We don't have to live like this, because Jesus came to earth to set us free from fear.

The Scriptures are very clear that Jesus came to set us free from inner prison cells of the heart, including the ones marked "Fear." The Lord Jesus became a human being to take into Himself, the infirmities of our hearts, souls, and minds. As He gave His life for us on the cross He fulfilled the powerful, 700 year-old prophecy of Isaiah found in 53:4, 5:

*"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. **But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.**"*

According to this prophecy, in Christ Jesus, we are given peace with the Lord God Almighty. Scripture teaches us that His love dwelling in our hearts drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment, and we have experienced His grace! We are given the privilege of experiencing deliverance from bondage or slavery to all kinds of fear. In Him we are set free from fear of failure, from fear of God striking us down, punishing us for every act of disobedience, fear of meeting God some day and being judged, and fear of death as the ultimate enemy.

We are given a tremendous word regarding Jesus coming to our rescue in Hebrews 2:14, 15. *"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity **so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.**"*

II. Your Savior has Come:

The simple fact regarding our salvation is this; we desperately needed a Savior to come to our rescue. When it comes to the issue of sin, we must understand that it is our having transgressed what we know to be right. It is failure to do what we want to do. It is an internal leaning to want what is wrong or harmful to us. Each of us knows the power of guilt we feel because of sin. The truth is there is nothing we could ever do to rid ourselves of sins we have committed.

There is, in the church of Jesus, a human-based theology of works-based-righteousness. The thinking is that God has an instrument in His hand called a "Scale of Justice." God puts the bad things we do on one side of the scale and the good things we do on the other side of the scale. The one who trusts in his or her works then spends an enormous amount

of time, energy, and effort insuring that the good works outweigh the bad deeds, thus granting us God's approval.

The problems with this theological line of reasoning should be obvious to everyone. Let's consider the three most glaring problems with this stream of thought known as legalism:

First, it does absolutely nothing to rid the human heart of knowing we have committed sins, that there are unrighteous actions stored up in our memory banks.

Secondly, we feel guilty for those things we have done, and doing good deeds doesn't alleviate the invasive and pervasive feelings of guilt.

Thirdly, how does one know how good is good, and furthermore, how much good is enough to outweigh our sins? The measuring instrument is always just a little further ahead of us in the next good thing we do. But here is what makes this works-based-righteousness so evil: It gets even further out there with the next wrong action we take!

The Bible is quite clear in regard to sin and sin's power to enslave the human heart and soul. We are hopeless to do anything about this on our own merits. In order to explain the fact that we are hopeless to do anything about our sins rooted in our self-interest, Paul used an entire chapter in his treatise on doctrinal truth to the Romans, when he wrote Romans 3!

Consider the message from last week as we looked at the text of Romans 5:6 – 8: *“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

To people like you and me, who struggled with, or are presently struggling with our hopelessness to do anything to rid ourselves of sin and its power to enslave our hearts and minds, Jesus came to the earth to be our Savior. **The angels announced the awesome news, “Today in the city of David, a Savior is born to you.” We aren't hopeless any longer, because Jesus came to help us.**

III. You May Live in Peace:

The angels sang a hymn of praise to God, in which was the glorious message of salvation; that we all may live in peace with one another. The concept of peace in human relationships is something with which all of us could stand a lot of help and blessing right now. This past year 2020 has to be one of the most contentious, ugly, mean-spirited, divisive periods of time in my culture that I can ever remember!

I have watched the intense political debates between people in the body of Christ who are called to love each other, tear into one another over which political party we have embraced, what candidate we support. We have said and written things on social media

that called into question one another's thought processes, character, and Christian faith principles. We have spoken and written negative words on social media to people with whom we disagree clearly and, have done so seemingly without feeling any guilt for it or grief about having said or written things that wound our brother or sister in Christ!

Here in our own local church family, I have watched and listened to literally hundreds of opinions about what we did about our response to the COVID 19 virus, what we didn't do, and what or whom we were in danger of killing if we didn't respond better next time. We spoke and wrote in social media, awful things about one another, and we called into question each other's motives and faith in Christ Jesus!

One of the deepest issues of the human heart is our need to be involved in meaningful Relationships with people we love and respect. And one of our biggest struggles with our meaningful relationships is rupturing of and wounding in these primary relationships we need. So, what makes the gift of salvation such a marvelous and special gift is that it's so pervasive and invasive in our relationships. We are enabled in Christ Jesus to live in peace with each other by extending grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

Because Jesus our Lord and Savior has taken from us on the cross everything that is offensive to God, things we did or said or wrote that stood as a wall between us and the Father, and put them to death for us on the Cross, He removes all of those things from us. Jesus has done everything necessary to make it possible to live at peace with God. He has cancelled all offenses and gives us the opportunity to experience freedom from them.

When we experience peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, we are enabled to come to peace with ourselves, the things, leanings and desires toward selfish values, rooted in self-interest, which we have seen in our lives with which we are displeased.

When we experience peace with God we can make peace with our past, with our failures, with guilt that may plague us, and with the wounds in our hearts from having been hurt by life's experiences.

When we experience peace with God, and come to peace within our own life, we are set free to make the choice to sow peace into in our relationships with the people in our lives who matter to us so much.

Do you see the progression of what is available to us all through the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross and by His resurrection power? He has made peace with God available to each of us. Paul says it this in Romans 5:1, 2: *"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand."*

When I live in peace with God in my heart, I am enabled to live in peace with myself, with my past, and even in the present. That means I can choose to sow real, lasting, relational peace in my primary relationships with my spouse, children, grandchildren, my

extended family, and I can sow divine peace given to me by Jesus in my relationships with my brothers and sisters in Christ!

IV. You Have God's Favor:

Without question in my mind, at deeply personal levels for me, this is the most profound thing the angels announced to the shepherds that night regarding our salvation. We do not have to earn God's favor, or jump through hoops to get God to like us more. **We have all been given the favor of God, as a gift of His grace in and through the ministry of Jesus for us.**

There are so many people who have a gross misconception of the heart of God for people, because they have received a gross misrepresentation of God from people. There are so many people who have received guilt motivation and legalistic thinking from churches and church leaders, that this powerful Biblical Truth of the fact that we have already been given His favor is a concept that is inconceivable.

If you have been taught through highly respected church leaders, perhaps you learned from your parents or some other hero of the faith for you, that God is angry and punitive, and you must toe the behavioral line or risk His wrath being poured on your head, that is your fundamental principle. To think of God as predisposed to be gracious and merciful to you is a foreign thought.

Yet this is exactly how God reveals Himself in Scripture. He shows us over and over in the Word, that He has already poured out His wrath against sin into the body of Jesus on the cross, His justice regarding our sin and sin's power to enslave us has been satisfied for us by our Lord Jesus.

Sins we have done, transgressions we inadvertently have committed, infirmities in our hearts from having been wounded by life, and iniquitous patterns we see in our family line are included in the ministry of Jesus on the cross. All of these offenses to the heart of God, have been placed in the bosom of Jesus Christ, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

In Paul explains this powerful truth to us plainly, in II Corinthians 5:17 – 21:

*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, **not counting men's sins against them.** And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**"*

Paul's conclusion echoes what the angels announced that night. We live in the day of God's favor because of Jesus. There are no lists we have to do to get God to like us more.

There is nothing we can do in order to make Him more favorably disposed to give us the gifts of His mercy and salvation, cleansing of our sins and His Spirit to live in us.

He put it this way to the Corinthian church, II Corinthians 6:2: ***“I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.”***

Conclusion:

"God's Precious Gift of Salvation"

Luke 2:9 – 14

Introduction:

The central theme of the Christmas story is the Lord God Almighty communicating His great love for us all.

Let's not fall into the trap the commercialist tells us to do. Our gift-giving can be significant if we take the time to **E**_____ the **L**_____ we feel for the ones we are giving to!

The theme of the gifts of love is exemplified in the central figures of the Christmas story: Mary and Joseph, who **G**_____ **T**_____ to the Lord to be used as He saw fit to use them!

The theme of the gifts of love is the Wise Men from the East. They were stirred by God, they sought Jesus, they found Jesus, they encountered Jesus, and they worshipped Jesus! They gave Him gifts: **G**_____ ... **I**_____ ... **M**_____!

Gift-giving has its origins in the heart of God, His great love for us moving Him to send Heaven's best to redeem us all: John 3:16. II Cor. 8:9 and 9:15

Paul tells us the indescribable gift of God is our **R**_____ made available to us through what Jesus came to do for each of us. Scripture teaches us Jesus paid the price to redeem us from **S**_____ ... **S**_____ -**I**_____ ... Satan's **P**_____ and **D**_____ as the end of life.

The amazing thing about this story of God's love, giving us His One and Only Son to be our Savior, is that He goes on to **F**_____ each of us, **E**_____ His love to us, and **E**_____ to us His grace and mercy. Luke 2:9 – 14

I. Do Not Be Afraid!

The angel's first words to the shepherds out in the fields, speaks to the human condition, when we are confronted with the glory of God: "Do not be afraid!" There are healthy fears ... and there are unhealthy fears ... fears that are irrational.

The Scriptures are clear; Jesus came to free human beings from inner prison cells of the heart and soul, including the cell doors that have the word **F**_____ written on them!

Isaiah writes that, in Christ Jesus, we are given peace with the Lord God. John adds that His love dwelling in our hearts drives out fear, for fear has to do with being tormented!

II. Your Savior has Come:

As we think about our need of a Savior to redeem us, the fact we must all face is sin, guilt, sin's desires, and iniquitous streams of the heart and soul are all part of life. When it comes to sin and its grip on us, there is absolutely nothing we can do about it!

There is, in the Church of Jesus, a theology of works-based-righteousness, that teaches its adherents to most important thing to know about God is that He is holding a scale of justice in His hand!

There are three significant problems with this line of thought: 1. It does nothing to rid the heart of our **S**____ 2. We still feel **G**_____ 3. When is enough **G**_____, good enough?

The angels announced, "*Today in the city of David a Savior has been born to you*". We aren't hopeless any more: Jesus came to **R**_____ us!

III. You May Live in Peace:

This is the year of two things that have torn apart relationships, in the nation, our church family, and our families. Politics and COVID 19.

One of the deepest heart issues we all have is our need to be involved in meaningful **R**_____ with people we love and respect. When these are torn apart, we feel deep inner lack.

Salvation in Jesus Christ invades our relationships, draws us to extend to others what we have been so freely given: **G**_____, **M**_____, and **F**_____. In Jesus we may experience peace with God, which impacts our **P**_____ and our primary **R**_____!

IV. You have God's Favor:

The fourth word of the angels to the shepherds is: "You have the **F**_____ of God!

The Lord God reveals Himself in Scripture as a seeking Savior, who comes after us again and again. He reveals Himself in Jesus as desiring to extend to us His love, His grace, His mercy!

What Jesus has done for us all, Paul records for us in II Corinthians 4:17 – 21! Jesus has **T**_____ **A**_____ our sins and offense!!

Discussion Starter Questions for Home Groups

1. What are some things you immediately think of when you hear the word “Christmas”?
2. What reasons can you think of why the culture we live in here in North America has edited the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ out of its conversations about Christmas?
3. The theme of gift-giving is all throughout the narrative of the Christmas story. Which expressions in the lives of the characters in the story, acts of self-emptying love touch your heart? Why that person?
4. What are things you can name, as you talk in your group, that Jesus has come to set us free from? What are some of the more commonly held “inner prison cells” people need Jesus to set them free from?
5. As you think about the gift of God’s amazing love, giving us grace and mercy and set that in contrast to the legalist’s view of works-based-righteousness, what are some of the clearer distinctions between the two viewpoints?
6. How would you describe sin, sinful desires, self-interest, and iniquities to someone who is searching and knows very little about God’s Word?
7. What does the word “Immanuel” mean? Why is it so important that Jesus is both the Son of God and the Son of Man as He acts to redeem us all?
8. Read together aloud John 1:1 – 18 and share with one another insights you see in the text about who Jesus really is and what He came to earth to do.
9. Read together aloud the Christmas story from Luke 2:1 – 20 and discuss insights you have as Luke describes the event.
10. What things impacted you as you heard the message about God’s holy love for us as He acted to send Jesus into the world to redeem us?