

“The Gift” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Christmas Eve December 24, 2025

- I. **Luke 2:1-20; Titus 3:3-7** – previously read
- II. **One of the highlights of Christmas** for many people is opening gifts.
 - a. I know that's not what Christmas is all about, but in many ways sharing gifts with each other is an act of love.
 - b. I think I have mentioned this before, but my wife Michele's grandmother used to buy between twenty and thirty Christmas presents for each of us.... I could hardly believe how many gifts she would pile up for everyone.
 - i. Of course, we appreciated the generosity, but part of the fun was opening a sweater that was four sizes too small, trying to squeeze into it, and then taking a picture of one of us stuffed into a tiny sweater.
 - ii. She shopped all year long, and anything she found on a clearance rack or in a bargain bin was fair game.... As a result, in most years only two of those twenty gifts were actually keepers.
 - c. I read an article about Christmas presents, and a survey showed that each year, 53% of Americans receive a gift they don't want.
 - i. 1 in 20 people receive five or more gifts they don't want (which was me with Michele's grandmother, mostly because nothing fit)
 - ii. It's estimated that 10 billion dollars is spent on gifts that are unwanted... and the average cost is \$72 per gift...
 - iii. So, when someone tells you, "Oh, you shouldn't have!", they might be serious.¹
 - iv. I suppose there is a sense of excitement and anticipation that goes with seeing gifts wrapped up waiting for us to open... no matter how we feel after opening them... especially knowing they were wrapped and given to us out of love.
- III. **Yet, we cannot forget that Christmas is all about a gift.... or the gift.**
 - a. Not something found underneath a tree... and never a disappointment.
 - i. Unfortunately, the most important truth about Christmas gets lost in the mall... or in the extravagant light shows... or "door busters" at our favorite big box store.
 - ii. We need to be reminded again and again that the most important truth of Christmas is not found in the gifts we give or receive, but in the greatest gift of all... a gift laid in a manger... the little Baby, sent to save His people from their sins.
 - b. You see, at the beginning of creation, the first people God created chose a different path than living in paradise... they rebelled against God and went their own way.
 - i. Out of that rebellion, sin, brokenness, and evil entered into the world – including every human being and all of creation...

- ii. The Bible says that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory (Romans 3:23) and that we are dead in our trespasses and sin (Ephesians 2:1) – so, no one is right with God or able to come to Him without some kind of outside intervention.
- iii. The wonderful news in this story is that God didn't leave the human race to die without hope... He promised that someone would be born in the future to bridge the gap of our sin and brokenness.
 - 1. For thousands of years, prophets were given a message from God to inform people... and they spoke God's truth that the Christ, or the Messiah, was the promise God would send.
 - 2. And that's why in the very same sentence that starts with "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," it goes on to say... but God shows us mercy we don't deserve by making us right with Him... and He did this through the gift of Jesus, who freed us from the penalty for our sins. (Romans 3:24)
- c. The first Christmas gift was God's Son... who was born as a baby... who was born to save us.
 - i. And this is the real gift of Christmas!
 - ii. The promised Immanuel... or "God with us"... had arrived.
 - iii. He was the only intervention that God would offer to rescue us from the curse of sin and death.

- IV. **Jesus is the gift that the angel** announced to the shepherds to show us that God did not come in the flesh for some people.... but for all people.
- a. He said, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:11-12)
 - b. You would think God coming to earth would be wrapped in fancy clothes and lying in a palace... but Jesus was wrapped in simple strips of cloth, lying in a feeding trough.
 - i. It seems the only fanfare and celebration was when the heavenly host broke out into praise worship with the announcement that Jesus the Savior had finally arrived.
 - c. The common shepherds and simple surroundings showed that the Baby born in Bethlehem was a gift for even the lowliest... there is no preferential treatment... because everyone has sin that separates them from a perfect, holy God... and God alone could make it right.

- V. **We naturally assume** that being good or doing the right things will somehow make us right with God... but that assumption misses the heart of the Gospel.
- a. Listen again to what the Bible says in our reading in Titus, "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness but according to His own mercy." (vv 4-5)

- i. God saved us out of loving kindness, and He was motivated by mercy... which means that our salvation was “not because of works done by us in righteousness.”
 - ii. As difficult as this is to understand, God is not like Santa Claus, who only gives gifts to good little boys and girls... because the gift of salvation has nothing to do with our behavior... or how hard we try to be good.
 - iii. Instead, He gives the gift of the Savior purely out of His unmerited mercy and grace that comes from His unconditional love.
- b. It's like the story of a busy mom... wrapping presents a few days before Christmas.
 - i. She asked her young son to shine her shoes for the Christmas service... and after a while he comes to her with a big grin on his face holding out her shiny shoes.
 - ii. She was so happy with him that she gave him a five-dollar bill... but on Christmas morning, when she tried to put her shoe on, there was a lump in it.
 - iii. After looking to see what was going on, she found a note with the five-dollar bill wadded up in it... and her son scribbled his best writing down that said, “I done it for love.”
- c. Tonight, as we look in the manger, we see a message wadded up... wrapped in swaddling cloths... which explains God's real gift to us.
 - i. He says, “I done it for love.”
 - ii. You see, when God gives us Jesus Christ, He is not just giving us a gift... He's giving us Himself.
 - iii. It was because of love that the infinite Creator of the universe took on a created body, and a helpless infant no less!
 - iv. It was for love that He grew up to offer His life as a ransom for sinners... as the Bible says, “The goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared.”
 - v. And so as you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord... and His life, death, and resurrection for you... you are forgiven and delivered from eternal death.
- d. I cannot promise you will receive a gift this Christmas that you love... but I can promise that the gift of Jesus came from pure love for you.
 - i. Believe this promise... that Jesus truly came into the world as the only answer to our sin and brokenness... dying on the cross to buy us back from a life separated from God.
 - ii. So tonight, whether the gifts under your tree make you so happy... or they disappoint you... hear and believe this promise... in Jesus Christ, laid in a manger and lifted up on a cross, God has given you Himself... pure love, full forgiveness, and life that will never end. Amen.²

¹ Chris Melore, “You shouldn’t have! Holiday shoppers spending \$10.1 billion on gifts nobody wants,” Study Finds (12-19-24)

² Sermon based on © 2025 Concordia Publishing House, *Every Heart Prepare*, Advent-Christmas series