

Christmas Eve
December 24, 2024
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Luke 2:10-11 (EHV)

The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. For behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all people: ¹¹Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord."

Dear Friends in Christ,

Every Christmas you will hear about some extravagant gifts being given. NFL quarterbacks give the linemen who protect them unique and expensive gifts like new cars or custom Japanese swords. The ultra wealthy of society may give away nearly priceless works of art or new yachts. Back in the day, people would stand in long lines and sometimes get into serious scuffles to get that Cabbage Patch doll or new Apple product. People put lots of money and sometimes lots of effort into gifts at this time of the year.

No one more than our God. The angel announced the arrival of this gift and told the shepherd who this gift is: "He is Christ the Lord." This is the fulfilment of God's promise to Adam and Eve. This gift is the Messiah, the one anointed to defeat the devil and bring people back into the family of God forever. And this gift is the Lord himself. The Son of God was given to us by his Father. The Son of God gave himself on the cross to save us. There is no greater gift.

Tomorrow we will marvel even more at the glory of the Savior who is both God and Man in one person. Tonight, we marvel at the nametag on this gift. For the Son of God, the Savior was born for you. Your name is on this gift.

But why would God give us such a precious gift as his own Son? Why does anyone give another person a gift? If it is truly a gift, it is given out of love and thanks and the joy that it will give to the one who receives it. But there is usually some relationship between the giver and the receiver. I don't expect any NFL quarterbacks to leave a new car in my driveway. You are probably not expecting to open any gifts under your tree from one of the billionaires of this world. Who are we, that someone rich and famous should consider giving us a Christmas gift?

It might be that we feel that way about the gift of God at Christmas too. Who are we that God should give us his greatest gift? I'm just one of the billions of people who live and have lived in this world. Nothing special that God should put my name on such a gift. In fact, there are many reasons why God should cross our name off the gift entirely. He knows the filthy thoughts that I've allowed to linger in my mind. He knows the filthy words that have been spoken by me. He knows the times I've refused to do what is right and instead chosen to go my own way. Not only am I an ordinary human being among billions, but I am also a sinner who does not deserve anything good from God. Why would God give the gift of his Son to me?

The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. For behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all people: ¹¹Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord."

The gift of Jesus was for every one of the billions of people in this world. And the gift of Jesus is for people just like you. Mary and Joseph were there when their Savior was born. But who were the first people besides Mary and Joseph to be told of this heavenly gift? The shepherds! God did not send out the birth announcement of Jesus to the kings and governors and emperor. The religious leaders were not the first to receive the good news of great joy. God did not light up the sky around the temple in Jerusalem with his glory that night for the important people of society to see. Instead, his glory shone around some shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem.

Shepherds did not hold a high place in society. The elite in society did not encourage their sons

to make shepherding their career. Be a scribe, a rabbi, a businessman, a trader, but not a shepherd. Shepherds have to work all night to protect the sheep. They live in the elements and smell like they live outside with the sheep. Shepherds may have been treated a little like cleaners are today. People often walk by the housekeeper at the hotel, the school janitor, the hospital room cleaner without much notice. Oh, we notice when the cleaners don't do their job, but otherwise they are somewhat invisible. Perhaps we could thank those with somewhat thankless jobs, especially those working on Christmas. Shepherds were likely overlooked when walking through the markets on their way to and from the fields too. They would get some real attention only if they lost some sheep to predators or thieves.

God put their names on the greatest gift.

Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you.

That for you was for the shepherds. "For you" is for all who are overlooked, ignored, lonely, forgotten, and sad. "For you" is for everyone who is ashamed of their past, for all who have made choices they regret, for all who have sinned against the Lord God. "For you" is for the billions and for the one "you" sitting here today. You have received the birth announcement for God's Son. Your name is on the gift of the Savior.

Once, we had no relationship with God. By his pure grace and favor he gave us a Savior in Jesus and now we are brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus through faith in him. We had given, and still give, God reasons to overlook us and cast us away because of our sins. But he chose to love the world. He chose to give the great gift of Jesus to the world. He chose you to receive this good news of great joy. Because of God's choice and God's gift, you have not only the gift of forgiveness of sins but also the gift of eternal life.

Many of the gifts we give and receive do not last until the next Christmas. I know the many cookies and treats my family received will not last long at all. However, Jesus is always with us. He is always ready to forgive, to encourage and to strengthen us. Remember this all year so that you can do what the shepherds did after receiving the birth announcement from the angel. They hurried to the manger to see their Savior. When you are sad or lonely this year, hurry to the manger and see Jesus who is as Isaiah prophesied, the Wonderful Counselor. When you are afraid and worried, hurry to the manger to see your Savior who is the Mighty God. When you have fallen into sin, hurry to the manger in repentance to see Jesus who is the Prince of Peace who restores peace with God for you.

We rejoice tonight and always because the news of the angel is for all and for you.

"Do not be afraid. For behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all people: ¹¹Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord."

Amen.