

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

*¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”*

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 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. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. (Luke 2:8-20)

Do You Treasure These Christmas Gifts?

In 1984, I was in the army, stationed in Augsburg, Germany. I was 21 and single and I spent a lot of time and money that year buying Christmas presents and sending them to my family back home. I bought each of my grandfathers a beer stein. One grandpa lived his whole life in the country. He was hunter and farmer and I chose a stein with those kinds of scenes on it. The other was born in Chicago but grew up in Poland. I always thought of him as having seen more of the world. For him, I bought a stein that had a 16th century picture of the Augsburg city scape. I mailed them and all my presents to my parents and asked them to distribute them. Well, somehow, the steins got reversed. I didn’t realize it until I came home the next year for one of those grandfather’s funeral and my grandmother gave me back the stein he got. Years later, when the other grandfather died, I got that one back, too. So, did those grandfathers appreciate those gifts, even though they got the wrong ones? I never went up to them and asked. But the fact that people remembered that they came from me and made sure I got them back probably means something.

What do you think you’ll get for Christmas this year? Do you think you’ll like it? Do you think you’ll treasure that gift and keep it for years? Tonight, we want to consider the gifts that God gave us at Christmas. He didn’t just give us one. We’re going to mention three. When all is said and done, there’s a important question that we all need to think about. My friends, **do you treasure these Christmas gifts?**

I.

When I was child, my parents used to hide our Christmas gifts. Being the rotten kids that we were, we looked for them. Then my dad would threaten that we wouldn’t get any that we found, because they were supposed to be a surprise. Of course, that’s why we wrap gifts, right? God didn’t wrap the presents he gave us on Christmas. In fact, he told his people exactly what he was going to give them. Yet, they were surprised by his gift. Tonight, we have the account of the angel of the Lord announcing God’s central gift to the shepherds of Bethlehem. **Do you treasure this Christmas gift? The first gift of Christmas is the Christ Child.**

The shepherds hurried off to see that gift. But what did they go to see? A newborn baby. But how unusual was that? Babies are born every day. Now this baby wasn’t born in a hospital, but nobody was back then. Being wrapped in strips of cloth seems strange to us, but that’s what they usually did. Now, it was unusual to lay your baby in a manger – in a feeding trough. It was unusual for a baby to be born in a stable. But given the circumstances, it was understandable. The Romans were conducting a tax census and they sent everyone to their ancestral home to register. If you’ve ever tried to find a motel room on a busy tourist weekend, you know how difficult it can be. So this gift would’ve looked a little unusual. But not so much they would’ve left flocks in the middle of the night if an angel hadn’t come and told them about him.

So why should they treasure him? Because of who he is. The angel said, **“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”** For Jewish people at that time, these words were loaded with meaning. God had been promising them a Savior for centuries. Now, God was keeping that promise. Calling him Christ was not giving his name. Christ is actually Jesus’ title. Christ is a Greek word that means the Anointed One. The Hebrew is the Messiah. God was saying, “This is the one. This is the fulfillment of all that I have been doing in Israel since I first chose Abraham to be your ancestor.”

God was really pointing past the baby. He was saying what this baby would become. When my children were babies, I used to daydream about what they would become. Now, the youngest is almost 18. Guess what? I wasn’t even close about a lot of things. It’s just not possible to know what your children’s future. But God told the shepherds what lay at the other end of this baby’s life: he was their Savior, their Christ, their Messiah. He was the Lord, God most high. He was going to rescue them from sin and guilt and even from death and hell. He does that for us, too. That baby means that we don’t have to beat ourselves up anymore. We are forgiven. We are loved. That baby means that we don’t have to fear dying. We will live with Christ in heaven forever. That baby means that nothing that hurts us here is permanent. Treasure that gift, my friends.

II.

If hearing that raises questions in your mind, I’d love to tell you more about it. In fact, that would be the best Christmas gift I could give you. That’s what the angel did. My friends, **do you treasure this Christmas gift? The second gift of Christmas is the good news the angels brought.**

The angel said, **“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”** His first words were: “Don’t be afraid.” Does that surprise you? If you watch *It’s a Wonderful Life* again this year, will the angel Clarence say that to George Bailey? That’s not the way I remember the movie. Angels are good and if we imagine meeting one, we’d probably picture something wonderful. But we probably wouldn’t expect to be afraid. Yet almost every time an angel speaks to someone in the Bible, he says, “Don’t be afraid,” because sinners are afraid. Angels are holy. Sinners aren’t. The shepherds weren’t. They couldn’t help but worry that maybe God had sent this angel to punish them.

So he said, “Don’t be afraid” because God was not sending him to punish evildoers but to bring good news of great joy for all people. Of course, good news when you were expecting bad news means joy. If you get that horrible phone call that someone you love is in an ambulance and they’re going to have to do emergency surgery and you sit for hours and worry in the waiting room, when that doctor comes in, you almost can’t breathe. But when he says, “They’re going to OK,” it’s the most joyful thing you can hear.

When you’re afraid that something bad is going to happen to you – when you think that karma is going to get you, when you worry that you’re going to pay for the way you treated your parents when you were a teenager, when you dread the whole world finding out about your bad behavior, God says, “Don’t be afraid. I have good news for you.” The Savior is born. He has taken away all your sin. So for everyone who trusts in Jesus, those angels are never going to come in judgment. Even when our sinful actions have consequences here, God is still going to bring us home to heaven. He’s still going to set us free from everything that hurts us here. Jesus came to put an end to all fear, because all bad things die when we finally see Christ.

But we don’t see him now. So God has to tell us about him. God has to promise us a new a better life to come. God has to proclaim that our sins are gone and we are free from guilt and hell and even from death itself, or we would never know. So God did and God does. Merry Christmas! Jesus came for you!

III.

But that gift of the gospel message does you no good if you don’t believe it. The shepherds didn’t earn any points with God by leaving their flocks in the field and hurrying into town to find the stable. They went because they believed the message. That great message gave them faith. God’s Word describes that faith also as a gift from God, for them and for us. My friends, **do you treasure this Christmas gift? The third gift of Christmas is the faith that saves you.**

Faith isn’t something we choose to do. It’s something that God does in our hearts when he speaks the gospel to us. Did you ever order a Christmas present on line and have it arrive too late to be opened with the other presents? When that happens in my family, we make a card saying what the gift is and wrap it in a box. Then when someone opens it, they get a promise that a specific gift is coming. We trust that promise. In part, that’s because we know the person making the promise. But it’s also because the promise is keepable. If I open

one of those boxes and I discover that one of my kids is promising me a brand new Mercedes-Benz, I might have a little difficulty believing that promise.

God made an incredible promise, an impossible promise. He sent his Son into this world as a baby and he promised that through him, all that we have ever done wrong, all that we have ever said that was sinful or evil, all our hatreds and anger and evil thoughts are wiped away forever. There is no more guilt on our records. There is no more need to feel bad. There is no more need to be afraid. If we die at all, it will only be temporary. We will rise from the dead on Judgment Day and between now and then, we'll live in heaven with Jesus. You know what? No one could believe promises like that. They're just too big. They're like my kids giving me a whole fleet of Mercedes-Benz's. So God works through the promise and he does a miracle. He reaches into our hearts and he gives us faith. The good news about Jesus is his power to give us peace where there was guilt, joy where there was sadness, confidence where there was fear. Treasure that gift.

If you haven't opened your presents yet, you will probably receive more than one – unless of course, your spouse and your kids really did all go in together to buy you that Mercedes-Benz. In that case, you might only get one. And if I find a Mercedes-Benz in the driveway of my house on my way home, I won't complain if I don't get anything else. But most of us are going to get several presents today and tomorrow. God didn't give us just one gift at Christmas. God gave us Jesus. God gave us the good news of what he did for us and what it means. God gave us the faith that trusts in him and carries us to heaven. My friends, those are the greatest gifts you will ever receive. When all that we know here is gone, those gifts will remain. Treasure them now and forever. Amen.