

THE GIFT THAT FITS EVERY HEART

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What size? What shape, the human heart? Not the physical one, but the spirit of a man.

Variety is the Spice

Learn something special about the persons seated near you: Ask them what their favorite (something) is; you choose what it is you want to know about.

No matter how much the same we are, we are each unique. Diversity abounds. Favorite colors, flavors, animals, vacation spots, sports, foods, fragrances. We identify ourselves, and others, by these differences.

If I were to suggest that we all eat the same food for dinner everyday—no matter what I chose—we all would likely object at some point: B-O-R-I-N-G.

Today, in cosmopolitan America we are almost overwhelmed with choices. Let's go out for dinner...what kind of food do you want to eat? Italian? American? Chinese? Mexican? Thai? Afghani? Cuban? Puerto Rican? Greek? French? Spanish? German? Russian? Brazilian? Indonesian? These, and many more, are available right here in the North Bay. We want to have choices, but having so many often leads to indecision, if not mental paralysis.

Nevertheless, once you've tasted it, the "right to choose" is a privilege we do not want to forfeit. It's an American freedom! Anything less smacks of some brand of totalitarianism.

Maybe that's part of the reason there is so much resistance to the good news message of Jesus Christ. When the Bible says there's only one God and only one way to know Him, it seems so...un-American!

For some, it makes Christmas less merry. "Happy Holidays," is all they can muster. We might as well say, "Enjoy your days off."

Renewing the Old Story

But we're in *church* today! So, let's revisit the old story of the first Christmas once again, from the pages of Scripture. Try to imagine yourself there with the shepherds, seeing and hearing what they saw and heard. Imagine their feelings, their thoughts, their reactions, as we read.

Luke 2:8 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.*

Night Watchmen

Nothing harder than keeping watch at night. I worked for the Post Office one Christmas season. Being a night person, everything was fine until about 3:00am. For the next two hours, I could hardly stand on my feet. I slipped behind some storage shelves to slap my cheeks. I went to the restroom to wash my face. But, no matter what I tried, I was afraid I might collapse in sleep as I walked across the room! I've sat up with sick children through the night, rocking them, walking them, singing to them, praying over them—trying not to fall asleep and let them roll out of my arms.

Nothing is harder, though, than staying awake to watch others sleep! Especially if those others are sheep. These shepherds had to keep their eyes open for the inevitable approach of predators...all night long...outside, in the night chill.

Glorious Vision

Have you ever seen an angel of the Lord? A few have. To read their reports can be fascinating. I've never heard anyone describe them as short and pudgy, like the paintings of the romanticists. I have heard "tall, large, and strong." Makes sense, since these outdoorsmen were *terrified* at the sight!

What's more, this angel *spoke* to them! And his words, far from threatening, were appealing in a most compassionate way.

Luke 2:10 "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."

Good News

Good news is a *good* thing! However, good news may evoke various reactions: from some, relief; from others, comfort; others, hope. In this case, in contrast to their initial fears, this good news was intended to produce great joy. After all, a child was being born. That news usually produces great joy in some—the family members. But this child's birth was joyous news for *everyone!*

Not just beleaguered parents, or their close relatives, nor even just those who happened to be on hand at the time, but for "*all the people!*" That means people near and far—even total strangers. It means people then and now. It means young and old, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, able and disabled, thin and fat, fast and slow, handsome and homely, religious and not. The birth of Jesus is good news for you! And if you'll receive this news, it will bring you great joy!

Joy for You

¹¹ *"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you."*

A Savior has been born...to *YOU!* You're not just a bystander or a passerby. Jesus came for *you!* You're not an afterthought; God had you in mind when He prepared for the salvation of the world. Christmas is His gift *to you!*

Ephesians 1:4 Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵ God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.

Before He made the world...before you had taken one breath...before you made one poor choice...before you did one wrong thing...before you apologized, before you repented, before you prayed, or ever promised anything to God—before all of that, He loved you and chose you to know Christ and follow Him. Before all of that, He chose you to be adopted into His own family! God chose you to be His child, before you thought one thought, good or bad.

And *“this is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.”* Think about that.

Hebrews 4:15 This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

He may be the High Priest, but He is not so high that He is unaware of you. He knows your thoughts from far away. He understands your struggles...to choose...the right thing. He remembers that we were made from only dust. A Savior has been born *for you.*

Savior and Lord

¹¹ *“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”*

The Savior that was born is Christ the Lord. There is no other Lord; there is no one else like Him. Messiah the Lord. About this there is no choosing.

It doesn't make the news less good. It doesn't diminish the resulting joy. It doesn't lessen the universal availability of God's saving grace. In fact, it is what lends the power to His promised purpose to save you and make you His own.

It is not the plan of an idle dreamer, but of the Lord of all the earth. It is the plan of salvation devised and enacted by the Creator Himself. This is good news! God who made us has not forgotten us! He has come to save us!

Can anyone prevent Him? Can anyone stay His hand? Can anyone undo His works? Is there anything too difficult for Him? Your Savior is Christ the Lord!

Whoever you are, wherever you've been, whatever you've done or failed to do—Jesus is the perfect Savior for you.

Getting to Know Christmas

Christmas is not about being or becoming religious. Sometimes the best thing we can do for God is to shake the religion right out of us! If religious traditions have become your masters, be loosed today! If non-religious traditions have become your masters, be loosed from them as well.

It's time you got to know your Maker—before you make big choices you may regret, or before He calls you home, empty-handed.

Christmas is about family—a pregnancy, a place to rest, a birth, shared joy and wonder. Christmas is about good news and great joy—your salvation, adoption by God, His good purpose for your life. Christmas is about relationship...with Jesus, with God.

Luke 2:14 "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

All you have to do to begin is what those shepherds did that night so long ago: look, listen, and wonder (we've done that here today)...then, go and see (you can do that right now by a simple prayer)...then, tell others what you have found...and get back to the business of life, taking the presence of God with you, for He has promised, "Behold, I will be with you always, even to the end of the age."