

Christmas Gifts from God
Luke 2:1-14
December 25, 2016

Have you ever experienced a Christmas when you didn't receive any presents - not even one present? Everyone here probably has at least one gift under the tree. You may not know what it is, but it's nice to know someone thought of you.

Some of us, especially the kids and those who are still kids at heart, have probably made sure their Christmas gift list has been circulated far and wide. Wishing, hoping, and blatant hinting have probably also been practiced by many.

Most likely, you have taken a stroll around the Christmas tree to see if any packages had your name on them. You might have given some of them a preliminary lift to check the weight or a little shake to see if there's a rattle, all in an effort to get an idea about the contents. If you haven't already opened your presents, anticipation is undoubtedly running pretty high.

I would like to add to your presents a gift you won't find under the Christmas tree, but it is the best gift of all.

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 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. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly 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."

There are some Christmas gifts that often get overlooked. They might be gifts you have already received but haven't thought about for a while. If you don't yet know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, these are gifts you haven't received yet. Today we're going to look at God's Christmas gifts for you.

God's Christmas gift to the world is Jesus. After all, Christmas is all about Jesus. The very name Christmas says it's all about Christ. The world has tried to sanitize Christmas. The world has commercialized Christmas. Our school systems have tried to remove Jesus from Christmas by banning all references to Christ in plays and songs.

They use terms like winter solstice, winter holiday, or winter break. Happy holidays has replaced merry Christmas in many people's vocabularies.

Try as they may, they will never succeed in removing Jesus from Christmas, and the reason is simple. The opinion of the world doesn't change the fact that Christmas is grounded in the person and the work of Jesus Christ. The opinion of the world doesn't change the fact that God sent Jesus into the world to seek and save the very people who want no Christ in Christmas.

As God's Christmas gift to the world, Jesus brings certain gifts with him. Jesus came into the world for a very specific purpose. He came to bring the glory of his Father to sinners. In his Gospel account, John tells us that: *Jesus came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth* (Jn 1:11-14 NIV). Jesus came into the world for sinners. He came into the world for us. Jesus is God's Christmas gift to us.

Jesus brought four gifts from God. The operative word in that sentence is gifts. These are gifts freely given from our Father's love, grace, and mercy. These are gifts in the purest sense. We can't earn them and we certainly don't deserve them.

Jesus brings us the gift of forgiveness. Everyone needs to be forgiven. The only person to walk this earth without the need for forgiveness is Jesus. Paul writes: *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Ro 3:23). We all have sins that weigh on our conscience and mind. Sins that haunt us and tempt us.

Some of these sins may be public and those around us are witness to them. Some of them might be secret sins and we commit them when no one else is around. They can also be sins hidden away in our mind like envy, lust, hatred. No matter the type of sin, God knows all about them. We can't hide from our sins or their consequences.

The forgiveness Jesus brings can free us from our sins. Jesus said: *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full* (Jn 10:10 NIV). To have "life to the full" means you are no longer held captive by some sin. In Jesus, the chains that Satan used to tie you to your sin have been broken. You can not only conquer that sin, but your conscience and mind can be free from the guilt of that sin.

However, being free from your sin doesn't remove your responsibility for the sins you have committed. That is where the second part of Christ's forgiveness comes in. You are not just freed from the sin, you are also pardoned from the punishment of sin.

To be pardoned doesn't mean you are not guilty, it simply means the punishment has been set aside. God is holy and just. His righteous nature demands that all sin be punished. That's why Jesus went to the cross. Jesus took the punishment for our sin.

God deems the sacrifice of Jesus as sufficient punishment for the sins of all who believe.

Jesus brings the gift of hope. If there is one gift our world needs, it's hope. The world is a cynical place. The majority of people feel there is hope. They live lives of depression and despair. Their existence feels dark and dreary and they can't see a brighter future.

People are wasting their lives, their talents, their feelings, and their money desperately searching for something better than what they have. They gravitate to anything and anyone who looks like a promise of a better tomorrow. Some of them drift from one relationship to another trying to find someone who truly cares. Many children turn to street gangs hoping to find the love and security they need. These poor people always come up empty because they are looking for the answer in all the wrong places.

The hope that Jesus brings says something you can't find anywhere else. The hope that Jesus brings says – God cares. God cares so much about each of us that he sent Jesus to earth on a rescue mission. A mission that cost Jesus his life. God cares so much he is always willing to accept anyone and everyone who believes.

The hope of Jesus brings meaning to life. Untold numbers of people feel their lives have no meaning. They drift from day to day trying to understand why they're here. However, only in Jesus can the real meaning of life be found. With Jesus, we can find meaning in living for him by telling the world about him.

Jesus brings the gift of eternal life. Some people are completely disappointed with their lives. Without hope for the future and meaning for the present, they don't see a reason to go on. They struggle to go from one day to the next.

Other people think this world and this life is all there is to existence. They spend their lives trying to acquire all the possessions they can. They chase after anything and anyone they think will bring them pleasure. Their lives are spent pursuing a happiness they will never find because true happiness isn't found in the things of this world.

Jesus offers eternal life. He offers the promise of Heaven. This life is just a short journey to one of only two destinations. The hope of Jesus leads us to a place where there is no pain, no sorrow, no depression, no fighting, no hopelessness, no tears, no death. The gift of Jesus brings the gift of eternal life with him in Heaven.

Heaven is a place of unspeakable peace and joy. Paul told the Corinthian Christians: *No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him* (1 Co 2:9 NIV).

Jesus said: *In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am* (Jn 14:2-4 NIV). When he said that he

was talking about our Heavenly home.

The last gift Jesus brings is salvation. Salvation is a gift that only comes from God. Salvation can't be bought. It can't be earned. It only comes from faith in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. St. Peter says: *You are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls* (1 Pe 1:9 NIV).

This Christmas don't ignore the precious gift of your Savior. Spend some time meditating on the wonderful things God has blessed you with through Jesus. Most of all, take the opportunity that Christmas provides to tell someone about the forgiveness, hope, eternal life, and salvation that God has prepared for them.