

Christmas Eve Service 2017

Jeff - Welcome, announcements, prayer

Jeff - The promise of Immanuel

READING - Is 7:14; 9:6-7 (Worship Team)

Jeff - Remarks (SHORT)

SINGING - O Come, O Come, Immanuel

READING - Micah 5:2 (Worship Team)

SINGING - Oh Little Town of Bethlehem

Jeff Remarks

READING LUKE 2:1-7^[1]_[SEP](Lucas/Tim)

SINGING

- Silent Night
- Away in a Manger
- O Holy Night

Jeff - Remarks

READING: Luke 2:8-20^[1]_[SEP]Announced to shepherds by Angels^[1]_[SEP](Chris/Jessica)

SINGING

- Hark! The Herald Angels Sing
- Angels We Have Heard on High

Jeff - Remarks

READING: Matthew 2:1-12 (Vic)

SINGING - The First Noel

Jeff - Remarks **JOHN 1:4-5** - The glorious news that Christ has come

Closing Songs

- Joy To The World
- O Come, All Ye Faithful
- **Good-Bye/Instructions**

Welcome

Christmas is a time of giving because God gave a gift to us – He started it all, with the baby Jesus, born in a manger, in Bethlehem, Israel, around 2000 years ago. But He wasn't the first gift God has given to us.

In the first pages of the Bible we read that God created the whole world and everything in it. The Bible says everything He made was good, perfect, and wonderful, and He gave it to humanity to develop and explore. It was a *good* gift – you know most Christmas' you get some nice gifts, things you're thankful for, and then, sometimes you get the *good* gift – the one that blows you away, or that you *absolutely* love. Well, imagine being given paradise, and a perfect spouse to enjoy it with! That's what Adam and Eve received from God.

But, not long after they received the gift, Adam and Eve broke the only rule God had given them – they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There were a thousand things they could do and enjoy, and only one thing they were told no about, and they chose the no. They sinned by rebelling against God – doing what they wanted to do instead of what He said. And in the process, they instantly ruined the perfect gift they had just been given. It was like dropping a fragile custom-made piece of pottery on a concrete floor - there was no taking it back, no getting another, no fixing it with a little bit of glue. They had just broken their relationship with God and with each other.

There are few things worse than breaking a brand new, nice, gift. Fortunately, God came looking for them; He talked with them about what they had done. He said there would be consequences for the rebellion – that justice would be served, but He also promised mercy would be shown. He would clean up the mess, and one day, He would pay for what we had broken and provide us a way back into relationship with Him.

He promised a Savior would come, to 'save us all from Satan's power, when we were gone astray' in the words of the Christmas carol. He promised the Messiah would bring us God's 'rest' and deliver us from 'dismay.' This gracious and merciful God promised that He would fix what we had broken by giving us another gift, a Christmas gift of epic proportions.

Over the course of hundreds of years God sent prophets, slowly revealing more and more of His glorious Christmas plan. God chose Abraham and promised the Savior would come from his descendants. Abraham became the grandfather of Israel who had twelve sons who eventually formed a nation, and it was to this nation that God sent prophets like Isaiah to describe what would eventually take place. We find these words in Isaiah chapter 7 and 9

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.

And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 Of the increase of *His* government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

That name, Immanuel, means God with us, it is what Jesus was – God with us - and Isaiah’s prophecy stirred up a hope among the people, that one day God would once again walk among us like He had with Adam and Eve. But until He did, the world remained separated from Him, ‘exiled,’ by sin. The Savior was promised, the next gift was coming, but He had not come yet and so we sing with a longing in our hearts: O come, O come, Emmanuel.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Micah 5:2 “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,
Yet out of you shall come forth to Me
The One to be Ruler in Israel,
Whose goings forth *are* from of old,
From everlasting.”

Oh Little Town of Bethlehem

Christmas is a season of expectation – especially for little kids – they look forward to what is coming and all the good stuff they’ll get. But the first Christmas kind of took everyone by surprise. No one knew exactly when it was coming. It wasn’t on the calendar. There was no countdown, no paper chains with a link broken each day until the last one is gone. No advent calendars full of daily treats. God just showed up suddenly one day in His perfect timing. He suddenly interrupted the life of a young girl, a virgin, with the ultimate surprise gift and told her she was going to be the one to conceive the Messiah Isaiah had promised. God would be with us, but He would also be *within* her.

The announcement came through an angel, and though she had some pretty reasonable questions about it all, she surrendered to what God wanted to do and rejoiced in the coming of her Lord. We find that story in the gospel of Luke

Luke 2:1 And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. 3 So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be

registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. 6 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Silent Night
Away in a Manger
Oh Holy Night

“His law is love and His gospel is peace
Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother
And in His name all oppression shall cease”

It was great news, but at what cost? How was He going to break the chains? How was the power of His name going to cause oppression to cease? The answer would be found at the cross.

Ever since the first sin in the Garden of Eden, when God’s first gift was broken, the world had lain ‘in sin and error pining.’ That’s an artistic way of saying the world and all the people on it do wrong things and are pining, or deeply desiring, a better life, to make better choices, to have better things, to be better people.

The Bible says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. None of us is truly good, all the time. We’re all guilty of doing things we shouldn’t have done or skipping things we should have done.

But that’s why the good news of salvation, God’s second gift, His Christmas gift, is offered to everyone. You see, when Jesus came, they didn’t just brief the President, it wasn’t classified, it wasn’t a secret someone had to let you in on. No, God sent word to lowly shepherds. Normal people. People without a rank or a title. In fact, He let them in on what was happening first. We learn about it in

Luke 2:8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

14 “Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

15 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. 17 Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. 18 And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

**Hark! The Herald Angels Sing
Angels We Have Heard on High**

Peace. Goodwill. Glad tidings. Great Joy. This is what God gives us in Jesus.

God didn't send us a banker or a development expert to end poverty or raise capital.

He did not send a farmer to end world hunger.

He did not send a doctor to cure our disease.

He did not send a teacher to educate us.

He did not send a scientist, an engineer or an environmentalist.

He did not send us a clinical counselor, a mentor, or a life coach

He did not send us an economist, a poet, an artist, or a lawyer.

Not a politician or a social worker, not a general or a nanny.

He sent us a Savior.

A Savior.

"Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth." And this is why Christianity is different from all the world's religions. There are many religions who say a god or gods came to earth. There are many religions who encourage people to do good deeds and live upright, moral lives. There are many religions that claim to be associated with miraculous events. But only Christianity has a cross.

Only Christianity boldly and exclusively claims - there one, true, living God who "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world, through Him, might be saved." (John 3:16-17)

Acts 4:12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

So, although "the wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:23).

There is nothing to earn or achieve or buy, there's nowhere to go, nothing special to wear, or say, or chant. The salvation Christians receive through Christ is a gift. It's good news! And although it can't be received *anywhere* else or from *anyone* else, it is for *everyone* who will accept it. In fact, when God's generous gift arrived, people came from all over to see what He had done. We hear their story in

Matthew 2:1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

6 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;
For out of you shall come a Ruler
Who will shepherd My people Israel.' "

7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

9 When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. 11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

12 Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

The First Noel

The wise men followed the light of the star to find Christ but John begins his gospel with these words about Jesus:

John 1:4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it...

The world could use a little more light these days, couldn't it?

And what about you personally? How many of you came in this morning under a cloud of darkness? Oh, maybe you tried to push it away by taking a pill, or drinking an extra cup of coffee, maybe you're just putting it out of your mind since it's time to celebrate Christmas – put on some nice clothes and smile and let's go do this church thing - but really, there's something lingering, something casting shadows in your life, and for all the joy and brightness the season is supposed to bring, you're just not feeling it? Maybe you're bitter, you're bummed, you're burned out and frazzled, and maybe you're just a bit cynical about it all right now.

My friend, stop expecting to find light and joy, peace and hope, satisfaction and contentment in the world around you – it may have been possible long ago, but we broke that first gift. You need to look instead to God above you and the hope of Christ within you.

You need to receive God's Christmas gift this year. Receive Jesus, the one who forgives your sins, heals your wounded soul, dries your tears, and makes His blessings flow, far as the curse is found.

Today we remember that there is joy to the world, the Lord is come, let earth receive her king – let every heart prepare Him room – open your heart, let Him in, then open your mouth and let the joy out.

If you want to do that – if you are ready to give up on living life your way and begin to live it for Him, then simply pray with me right now.

Heavenly Father,

I come to you this Christmas like a child asking for the gift of Jesus. I ask you to forgive me for my sins, for living life my way, and I ask that you would teach me how to live for you from this day forward. Help me to receive all that you have for me, and thank you for all you have given.

In Jesus name I pray,

Amen.

And for all of us, we pray,

Father, thank you for the gift of salvation that You have given to us. Help us to unpack everything that is in the box – help us to know You fully. Help us to rest in You this Christmas Season, help us to know the joy and peace the angels spoke of. Thank You for leading us to Jesus, and now, as we go out may You help us to be like the shepherds who “[made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child.](#)” Use us as Your ambassadors to bring hope and healing to those around us.

In Christ’s name,
Amen.

Joy to the World
O Come, All Ye Faithful