

DISTRACTED: Week Two

December 10th, 2023

“Fighting the Temptation of...”

REVIEW:

- The Christmas season is full of distractions that can keep us from the true meaning of Christmas.
- Last week, we discussed the distraction of trying to create the perfect moment, and instead, encouraged one another to have purpose in our presence and presents.

This week's **DISTRACTION**: the temptation of materialism, consumerism, and commercialism.

- **Materialism**- is the attitude of someone who attaches a lot of importance to money and wants to possess a lot of material things.¹
- **Consumerism**- the situation in which too much attention is given to buying and owning things.²
- **Commercialism**- the possibility within open-market capitalism to exploit objects, people, or an environment for private gain for the purpose of generating profit.³
 - ⇒ Shoppers around the country say they are planning to spend an average of \$793 for gifts this holiday season, down \$29 from \$822 last year.⁴
 - ⇒ It's estimated that over \$957.3 billion will be spent on holiday shopping this year.⁵
- Why is so much spent on material items at Christmas?
- Where did the notion of giving and receiving gifts at Christmas even come from?
- Should we buy and give gifts? How should we go about it? What should our hope and goals be in doing so?

MARY VISITS ELIZABETH: BLESSED

Luke 1:39-49 ³⁹At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴²In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" ⁴⁶And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.

THE SHEPHERD'S RESPONSE: PRAISE

Luke 2:15-20 ¹⁵When 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." ¹⁶So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

THE WISE MEN'S RESPONSE: GIFTS

Matthew 2:1-11 ¹After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi [wise men] from the east came to Jerusalem ²and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." ³When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.' ⁷Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." ⁹After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw

¹ Definition from Collins Dictionary: [collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/materialism](https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/materialism)

² Definition from Cambridge Dictionary: dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/consumerism#dataset-cald4

³ Quote taken from Wikipedia: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commercialism

⁴ Statistic from The American Research Group, Inc.'s 39th Annual Christmas Spending Survey: <https://americanresearchgroup.com/holiday/>

⁵ Repko, Melissa. "Deal-hungry shoppers will squeeze holiday sales growth to pre-pandemic levels, retail group says" CNBC.com, Nov 2, 2023. [Christmas Spending](https://www.cnbc.com/2023/11/02/christmas-spending.html)

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the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

HOW CAN WE BE BLESSED AND NOT CONSUMED THIS CHRISTMAS?

1. Recognize that God gifted us first—in Jesus, the perfect gift.

- God has blessed us and given us a gift in Jesus. He desires that we bless others and give gifts as He has for us.

2. God, through His Word, gives us examples of how we should gift others at Christmas:

- **Luke 1:39-49:** Mary and Elizabeth's Response: **Blessed**
 - The gift of Jesus results in those who receive Him being blessed.
 - As a result of gratitude and thanksgiving back to God for the gift of Jesus in your life, how can you be or speak a blessing to others for Christmas?
- **Luke 2:15-20:** The Shepherd's Response: **Praise**
 - As a result of gratitude and thanksgiving back to God for the gift of Jesus in your life, you can...
 - ◆ Give the gift of responding to God's call and the Gospel of Jesus.
 - ◆ Give the gift of sharing your testimony and faith with others to bless them with His truth and the goodness of the gift of Jesus.
 - ◆ Give the gift of simply showing up and being present, as well as intentionally celebrating and worshipping what God has done in the gift of Jesus.
- **Matthew 2:1-11:** The Magi's Response: **Gifts**
 - As a result of gratitude and thanksgiving back to God for the gift of Jesus in your life, you can give gifts as the Magi did:
 - ◆ They joyfully gifted others as an act of worship to Jesus and praise to God.
 - ◆ They gave gifts of significance, with intentionality that blessed the receiver, not consumed them.
 - ◆ They were willing to endure hardship and sacrifice in presenting their gifts, being clear that it was an act of worship to God and Jesus the Messiah.

There is no Christmas without Jesus! There are no gifts given without Jesus. Do you have Christmas without Jesus? Do you give gifts without Jesus?

CONCLUSION: We can be blessed and be a blessing to others this Christmas and not be consumed if we choose to recognize that God has blessed and gifted us first in the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, and we, too, can bless and gift others in the way God intends and as the Christmas story reveals!

QUESTIONS TO REFLECT AND DISCUSS:

1. What stood out to you from the sermon?
2. What is it that you desire to give and get at Christmas? Blessings or just material things?
3. Do you give and receive the types of gifts that are a blessing on behalf of God—or gifts that the culture tells you will fulfill you, that your flesh covets, and that will leave you wanting? Will you let others know what you want?
4. Do you recognize the blessings and gifts you already have? Do you think if we were cognizant of the blessings we have already, that we would be more thankful for what we give and receive?
5. How do you receive gifts that are given? What's it like to be someone who gives gifts "to you?"
6. What would it take for someone to bless you—Their prayers? Their words? Their presence? Their gifts to you on behalf of their gratitude to Jesus?

Next Week: Distracted (Week 3) Relational Distraction: An expectation of family can leave us distracted and exhausted!

Passages to prepare for next week: Luke 2:1-21