

Christmas Eve 2024, A Savior for All, Luke 2:6-20

Of course Christmas is a time of gift giving, I feel like I need to give a gift to the Amazon delivery people for as often as they are dropping off at our house in December. The majority of us will be opening up gifts *tomorrow*, but there are some exceptions. Just out of curiosity: how many of you open presents on Christmas Eve? Go ahead, raise your hand. We're going to call our prayer team from the back to come lay hands on you. Just kidding. Let's get nostalgic about Christmas presents for a moment and have some fun...what would you say was the most memorable gift you ever received as a kid at Christmas? The one where there was just so much anticipation of getting that gift that you couldn't sleep on Christmas Eve. And where your heart was pounding and and when you opened it you were so excited you were jumping up and down...Some of you need to go back to last year...and some of you need to go back to black and white...What was that moment. For my kids they might say getting our puppy **Cosmo**...or their newest gaming console... Shout some out. **Let's do a flashback here through the decades. Here's a list of some of the top gifts over the last 8 decades.**

1940s: Slinky

1950s: Hula Hoop

1960s: Barbie swept the country by storm, every little girl had to have one. And so the marketing geniuses created **G.I. Joe**. The action figure catered to boys, introducing "dolls for boys" under the guise of "action figures."

1970s: (I'm taking gaming devices out of this list starting in the 70s because they pretty much dominate). **Rubik's Cube**

1980s: #1 non-gaming gift for girls- Cabbage Patch Kids

1990s: #1 non-gaming gift for boys- Nerf Guns

2000s: Razor Scooters

2010s: Themed LEGO Sets which pretty much dominated Christmast in our house for almost the entire decade. One Christmas we took our kids to **Legoland** to have their minds blown. Also a close second- **Hoverboards** which immediately sent parents who thought they still had it, to the ER.

2020s (so far)#1 non-video game related gift of the decade?...Baby Yoda

Maybe for you it was one of these, and chances are the most memorable gift was something else. Ok now follow me on this- really important truth. All of these moments of anticipation, of joy, of gratitude, of longing at Christmas point to something beyond themselves and the moment. In C.S. Lewis' *Surprised by Joy*, talks about these joyful moments that we all have like we sometimes have at Christmas, he calls them signposts that point to something deeper, greater. "All joy reminds. It is never a possession, always a desire for something longer ago or further away or still about to be." An ultimate, everlasting joy. What the angels announced to the Shepherds in Luke 2 was the fulfillment of, the possession of that ultimate joy that every Christmas points to, the gift of Jesus Christ the Savior that first Christmas. We just read Luke 2, **10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.**

11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

I want to make two points for you to take with you this Christmas to consider.

1. Lesser Joys fade but the Ultimate Joy of Christmas lasts forever. Let me be a “debbie downer” just for a moment. Gifts that we receive at Christmas, even the most memorable ones, eventually lose their luster. Sometimes much sooner than we think...like when it breaks, or we realize that we aren’t coordinated enough to do a hula hoop or ride a hoverboard. Some of us will have this experience in less than 24 hours. C.S. Lewis calls this kind of joy like we experience with Christmas gifts “stabs of joy.” They come, they are even intense. They leave a memory and impression, but they do not last. They were never meant to last. Because there is nothing on this planet, nothing made by Apple, nothing delivered by Amazon, not even anything our loved one can make for us that can produce ultimate, lasting joy.

Now this is life-changing if we can really get our hearts to believe it. That all the things that we try to grasp in this life to give us ultimate lasting joy...anything that we pursue thinking, “If I have that, then I’ll be truly happy”, they are just stabs of joy. That new gaming system you want so bad, or the Barbie dream house this Christmas. Stabs of joy. That promotion at work. Stabs of joy, winning the championship on your team, that relationship, success, money, that house. It’s not that these things are bad. In fact they are often good blessings! But they are just signposts, hints and reminders to the ultimate Christmas joy that came 2000 years ago in a manger in Bethlehem, the Savior has been born. Do you realize what that means if it’s really true? It means that God really, actually did come to rescue humanity from the brokenness of sin, unbearable pain, inexplicable evil and ultimately death. That baby was born to bring us ultimate joy! He made ultimate joy accessible to us by his death on the cross and his resurrection at Easter. And he invites us into that ultimate joy found only in saving relationship with Jesus.

Some of you may be surprised to hear this, but God is fiercely committed to our ultimate joy. That challenges some of our views of God, thinking that God is standing with a divine lightning bolt waiting for us to mess up, is angry and wants to keep us from joy. Maybe you just see God through a set of rules or that God is just silent and aloof. But if what the angels announced to the shepherds is true, we can’t say that because God proved that he is far more invested in your ultimate joy than you are! Do you know this ultimate Joy found in Jesus, or are you still chasing it in lesser joys?

Second point to consider. **This ultimate joy is a gift for ALL PEOPLE.** V.10. And the proof that God was serious about the ALL in all people is that he announced this to shepherds! There were lots of people to whom this angelic choir could have chosen to appear that first Christmas Eve. They could have appeared in the luxurious palace of Herod, the acting King of Israel at the time, located just a few miles away. They could have chosen Rome, the capital of the world. Instead, they chose to announce Jesus’ birth to a group of unnamed, illiterate shepherds in an unnamed field in an unknown part of Israel. Shepherds might seem quaint and sentimental to us with

their furry little sheep and staffs, but they were anything but “cute” to ancient Israelites. Shepherding was the lowest form of labor available--the ultimate expression of unskilled labor, a job often given to kids or migrant workers. If as a Jewish adult you were still a shepherd, that was viewed as a total-lifefail.¹

And yet these shepherds received the good news that causes great joy! Yes, even you, especially you! The insignificant, the left out, the discarded. Jesus came for people with problems. In sending the angels to the shepherds, God was declaring that he sees and he cares about the poor. If your life is messy and broken, you have addictions, you’ve made some big mistakes, you have major regrets, or if you say it’s too late for me...he says, especially you! Anyone whom you have ever said or thought was a lost cause. “They will never change. They are too far gone. They don’t have any of the right beliefs. They would never come to church.” The gift of ultimate joy is for them too! Especially for them! Maybe some of you think of yourself that way. Maybe you are only here to appease mom or dad, or grandmom, or your girlfriend and you are an outsider to Christianity. Maybe you would say you aren’t religious or you don’t really have a sense of God in your life. But you are just the kind of people God says, “Yup- you qualify! I want to give you the gift of ultimate joy.” You are never outside of the reach of his grace. That was me...

So if you are still chasing the ultimate joy in other things will you realize today in the words of C.S. Lewis that those things are just "the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited." It is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ, life with him forever.

And will you consider that Jesus was born that first Christmas for you, especially you! The gospel is the most inclusive, exclusive message the world has ever received. It’s so inclusive that there has never been a person born who cannot access it. And it’s so exclusive that it is only found in one person- Jesus Christ.

¹ Some wording from J.D. Greear- <https://summitchurch.com/GetFile.ashx?Guid=56b332ed-be35-47ef-991f-5cb4294aafd4>