

Christmas Unwrapped Part 3

Who Is Christmas

Luke 2:17-35

Memory Verses: *John 14:6*

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

This Saturday most of you will be opening gifts around the Christmas tree. Small gifts, large gifts, cheap gifts, expensive gifts, clothes, electronics, gift cards. I know. I'm like Santa Clause, in fact, Santa Clause already told me what some of you are getting specifically! Spoiler Alert. **Bobby will get a new gun and an old Volkswagon. Chris Phillips will get some new tech thing that no one else has a clue about... but it will change our lives.** Don will get NC State everything. NC State socks, NC State ties, NC State sweater vests, NC State toilet paper, NC State underwear. David will get some clothes from his wife because he still doesn't know how to pick out an outfit. Thomas will get some tickets to a southern rock band that maybe one other person has ever heard about. Lauren will get a new coffee cup with a gift card in it... because I'm not very creative. Al & Becky will get a cooler full of deer meat from one of the twenty deer Jason killed this season. And, the Gregory's will get flannel shirts! The rest of you... Santa said you made the naughty list... so take it up with him!

But for real... I actually do know at least one of the **gifts** you are getting this Christmas. If I could get my friends to help pass them out. This is from us at Stone Creek Church to you.

Don't you just love unwrapping gifts? It's so fun! Of course as we said last week one of the reasons we hand out gifts is because the wisemen handed Christ gifts at his birth, but we can also trace this practice back to another story. In fourth century Turkey a Christian named Nikolaus became famous for his generosity. One of the most famous stories attributed to him is when he supposedly saved three young girls from becoming sex slaves by paying their dowry for them. How did he pay it? By putting gold coins in their socks while they dried by the fire place. Some time after his death he was venerated by the Catholic Church as a Saint. We know him today as St. Nicholas or Santa Claus.

It's interesting that when we unwrap Christmas we learn things that we never knew before... like the truth behind our gift giving traditions, or the real story of Santa Claus. It's interesting because in our world today, if I were to ask the question, "Who is Christmas?", many would probably answer, Santa Claus. Every Christmas movie is about him. Every Christmas card has his likeness on it. Every kid grows up learning

about the omniscient, benevolent, fat jolly man from the North Pole who brings toys to good boys and girls in order to drum up Christmas Spirit for all of us old fogies who have become scrooges or grinches. And though those stories have some merit, and are lots of fun, they disguise the truth. Santa is not the Who of Christmas at all. In fact he is merely the wrapping paper which encompasses a much greater who. Let's pick up where we left off last week in the book of Luke and find out Who Christmas is really all about.

Read with me **Luke 2:17-35**.

This passage shines the light on two people and their reaction to this new born child. The first is Mary, the earthly mother of Jesus, and the second is Simeon, a devout Jewish believer. You will notice here that both of them come to grips with who Jesus is in different ways. Mary ponders, while Simeon rejoices. Mary is unsure, Simeon has no doubt. Regardless, in the end they both come to the same conclusion... Jesus is the Christ, the long awaited for promised savior of the world. They both recognize, as we all must, that Jesus is the one true Who of Christmas. In the few short minutes we have left this morning I want you to recognize as both Mary and Simeon did, that **Jesus truly is Who Christmas is all about!**

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing when asking "Who is Christmas," is... **At Christmas We Must Ponder Jesus As Lord.** Look again at **vs.17-19**. The shepherds in a heightened state of bliss come to the manger, see Jesus, and then tell Mary something that basically puts her in a state of shock. It says that whatever they told her caused her to ponder it in her heart. So what exactly did they tell her? Let's go back a bit to **Luke 2:10-11**. They tell her that the angels to them that Jesus is the savior, that Jesus is the Christ, and that Jesus is Lord. A baby in a stone feed trough is savior, messiah, and Lord of all? Even as a seasoned believer who has been following Jesus for 35 years now, this still catches me off guard a little. It reminds me of **Philippians 2:8-11**. Even though He was born as a child in human form He has been given a name above every name, and at that name every human, every angel, and every demon will bow and confess that He is Lord.

This is too much for Mary to comprehend. Mary did you know? No she didn't know, that's why she takes time to ponder it. Let's try to process this with her if you will. First, the angel Gabriel, 9 months earlier, had visited her and told her that her son would be the Son of God and sit on David's throne. Although this was a lot to take in, she was able to wrap her head around it. Now the shepherds come and add more tidbits, mainly that her son is confirmed as the Messiah, the promised one who one day will save the world. While the details are sparse, the picture is becoming clear. But so far so good. What I think stops her in her tracks is what they say next; "Jesus will be Lord." Her son, will not only be the Lord of the Universe, but more importantly He will be her Lord! What would that mean for her?

Well, the word Lord means boss or master, right? In Christ's days sometimes people would use it as a sign of respect. "Thank you my Lord" as in, "i respect your authority over me." Most times it would be used as a title that regardless of respect or not, one would have to recognize and yield to - like a landlord; the boss and owner of a piece of property. He could kick you out on your butt if you don't pay the rent. Or like a Royal Lord who could make and enforce laws which if you disobeyed could result in death or imprisonment. Lastly, one in Jesus' time would call a warden or a slave owner, Lord, as they would be under their control. Mary undoubtably pondered all of these. Jesus is no doubt the highest authority worthy of our respect. As the Son of God, Jesus is the creator and sustainer of all creation, the true owner of every land. And, he certainly would be the King of Kings, eternally seated on David's throne. I can see Mary coming to grips with each of these with little hesitation. But what about the last one.

Could she come to grips with the idea that her son, Jesus, would be the warden of sinners and the master of slaves? In today's culture we wince at the thought of slavery, almost to the point that we have ridden our society of all vestiges of what it did to our country. We don't talk about it. Why? Because we know that it is wrong for any person to own another person like a piece of property. I'm sure in Mary's day they struggled with this notion to pretty much the same extent. So when the shepherds mentioned to her that Jesus would be her Lord, It meant that in a sense, she would be enslaved to him. That he would be so great, so awesome, so holy, that she could not help but find herself under his control. After all of the Lord's the people had seen for the last thousand years. The evil kings of Israel and Judah, the pagan kings of Babylon, Persia, and now Rome. The fake pretenders like Herod and the Pharisees. What would a good and Godly Lord even look like?

We too must ponder this. **What does it mean to subject ourselves to Jesus as our Lord?** It means we are servants and slaves under his control. It means we do what he says, we go where he sends, we work his fields, we feed his sheep, we follow in his steps, we suffer for his cause, we carry his banner, we fight in his army, we reap his harvest, and if need be, we carry his cross. **When we subject ourselves to Jesus as Lord, we become faithful and willing slaves committed to His cause and for His glory!** Can you do this? Can you submit to Jesus as your Lord? **Romans 10:9-10** tells us that we must confess that Jesus is Lord and believe it in our hearts and then we will be saved. This is how we must come to Jesus. This is how we truly experience Christmas. **Jesus truly is Who Christmas is all about!**

Secondly, when asking, "who is Christmas,"... **At Christmas We Must Celebrate Jesus As Savior.** Look again at **vs21-32**. Here we see

Simeon celebrate. He celebrates for a couple of reason. First, they name the child Jesus and then take him to the temple. Jesus literally means savior, or God saves. When they take him before Simeon who has been waiting to see the Christ before he dies, he instantly recognizes Jesus as the Christ and praises God saying in **vs30 - "for my eyes have seen your salvation"**. The point being... Simeon recognized as we all must that Jesus was the savior of the world and praises God for Him!

How exactly does Jesus provide salvation for the world? Well, thousands of years before Jesus was born, God created the Earth and mankind and everything was perfect according to God's design. The only stipulation put upon Adam & Eve, the first humans, was that they don't eat from the one tree in the middle of the garden. They could eat from any other tree, but not this one. And of course, like any of us, when we are told that we can't, we do! And so they rebelled against God causing a rift in the relationship between humanity and God. Their rebellion, also called sin, is our rebellion too. **Romans 3:23** reminds us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We are just as guilty. We have disobeyed God's plans for our lives ever since the day we were born. We've tried to live according to our own rules without giving much thought to what God wants for us or from us.

Because of this, **Romans 6:23** tells us that the wages of sin is death and separation from God. There is absolutely nothing we can do to fix this in our own strength. We can't be good enough to earn God's love again, and we can't run from it by burying our faces in the distractions of the world. What are we to do if we can't do anything?

Don't worry, God's got this. He made a way to restore us back to a relationship with Him by accepting His Son as Lord. That's why **John 3:16** – He sent His only begotten Son so whoever would believe in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. Believe in what exactly though? Believe that His life is enough to pay the penalty of our sin. God didn't just send Jesus to us to live amongst us and be our friend. Rather, he sent him to die in our place. And He did just that. 30 some years after he was born he died on a Roman cross by His own will to save us from our sins!

Now if you would only confess and believe that Jesus truly is who he said he was and that he did what he said he would do by dying on the cross for you and repent of your sins and follow him... you can be saved! So, would you, like Simeon recognize that Jesus is God's salvation for mankind and put your trust in him? **Jesus truly is Who Christmas is all about!**

And lastly... **At Christmas We Must Accept Or Oppose Jesus As God's Ultimate Gift.** Look again at **vs33-35**. In **John 14:6** the writer makes it clear that Jesus is the only way to God.. He is God's gift of restoration and salvation. No one comes back to God without Him. We have a choice! Choose Jesus and be restored to God or reject him and remain separate

from God forever. Just as Simeon tells Mary, in Jesus we either fall or rise. We can either fall by rejecting him; **Matthew 10:33** “if you disown Christ he will disown you,” **John 3:18**, “whoever doesn't believe stands condemned already,” or we can rise by accepting him, **1 Corinthians 15:22**, “all die in Adam but all are made alive in Christ.”

As Simeon reminds Mary, **In Jesus the true thoughts of our hearts are revealed.** I know that for many of us, Christmas may be one of the few times we make it to church each year. I wonder why that is? Could it be that we really want to choose Christ, but find it hard to commit our lives to Him? Perhaps its better to pretend to be a Christian than to actually be one? I get it. But, I disagree whole heartedly. Regardless, in Jesus there is no more pretending. You can claim to be a Christian and claim to love Jesus but at the end of the day all will be revealed as it truly is. That's why at Christmas we take communion. Communion is a time of reflection, a time to truly evaluate where we are with Christ. For you, is **Jesus truly is Who Christmas is all about?**

Application

As the deacons prepare to pass out the elements, today is a good day to fully Unwrap Christmas. It's not about Santa. It's not about all of the superficial things we've made it about. Ultimately Christmas isn't really even a Holiday... Christmas is a Who... Christmas is Jesus! You can never truly celebrate who Christmas is if you don't accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior! So today, exchange the wrapping paper for the real gift!

Conclusion

In preparing to take communion I just want to ask you a few questions. First, to those who would say that you are Christian this morning; if your heart was truly revealed today, would it show that you have made Jesus the Lord of your life and that you have believed upon his salvation? Have you repented of your sins and committed your life to following hard after Christ? What is your commitment to the family of God? What is your commitment to the word of God? What is your commitment to sharing the Gospel? If there are some things that need to get shored up in your heart this morning for the next few minutes I want you to do business with God.

Secondly, to those who would say that I know that I'm not a Christian. I don't really believe it and even if I did my life doesn't reflect it at all. I am dead in my sins right now! Today is the day of salvation. Would you finally stop running from Him and give in your life? He's already given you the greatest gift ever, salvation on the cross. Perhaps today you can finally surrender your life to him! If you would like to do that before communion this morning I would like to suggest a prayer to

pray right now.

For those of you who know that you are a believer and that you are where you truly want to be with Jesus this morning, you are more than welcome to take communion with us. For those of you who may still have sin in your hearts or know that you are not a believer, just know we love you and care for you but that communion is not for you this morning.