

Luke 2:8-20 | “It’s Present Opening Time!”
Preached on December 25, 2022 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can turn in your Bibles to Luke 2, verse 8. *[pause]*

Well it’s Christmas Day.

The anticipation is over, for it’s finally here.

And with the arrival of Christmas Day comes present-opening time. *[pause]*

I’m not sure if you opened your presents already, or if you will be doing so later today, but it’s always a great time. *[pause]*

Something that I absolutely love with present opening time is to watch the sheer joy of children.

They often can’t sleep at night because they are thinking about presents.

They even wake up early, and end up waking their parents up at the crack of dawn because of their excitement. *[pause]*

I’ve found with our kids that we can’t even have a slow morning eating breakfast because they keep insisting on getting to present opening time. *[pauseeee]*

When you finally begin to open presents, children are on the edge of their seats with eagerness, unable to wait patiently for their turn to open their presents.

Even when someone else is opening a present, they are wondering where their next one is.

And once they open a present, they are looking around for another. *[pauseeee]*

Presents bring joy.

And this morning, we are going to unwrap a present together.

It may not have all the pretty wrapping paper around it, but it is the best present that you will open this Christmas. *[pause]*

You may have thought that your best present was opened earlier this morning, or that it will be unwrapped later today, but it’s here and now.

And as we unwrap this present together this morning, may it bring you renewed joy not only because of the amazing Gift, but because of the amazing Giver.

We may not be on the edge of our seats, but we will be talking about something that can bring us eternal joy. *[pauseeee]*

After telling us of the birth of Jesus, let's READ what happens in Luke 2, starting in verse 8.
[READ VERSES 8-14]

Here we see some shepherds, who experience something amazing.

They are just going about their business, when an angel suddenly appears to them, and gives them world-altering news.

And in this news, God was sharing with them the best present ever.

And that's what we see first...

I. The Present: A Much-Needed Savior (8-14)

Why do we enjoy presents so much? What makes them so impactful? *[pause]*

First, they demonstrate love from the giver.

They are a way that someone shows us love by taking the time to think about us, think about what we would like, and sacrificing their time and money to do so.

When we receive a present, we are seeing love in action. *[pause]*

What else makes them impactful?

They are often something needed or useful.

They supply us with something that is lacking or makes life easier or something like that.
[pause]

And thirdly, a gift is impactful because it's free and unmerited.

We do nothing for the gift or else it is no longer a gift.

It touches our heart because someone else sacrificed to give us something that we did nothing to merit.

They gave, we only received. *[pause]*

So when we think about the gift of Jesus Christ, we realize that that's why we are so impacted by the reality of Christ's coming to earth.

It shows love, it gives us something needed, a Savior, and it was free and unmerited.

Now that's a present! *[pauseeee]*

After 400 years of silence, the good news of the Savior's arrival is finally announced to the people.

It may have been announced to Mary and Joseph, as well as Zechariah and Elizabeth - but now it's announced so that it spreads...

The Lord had visited His people.

He even sent angels to appear and bring the great news, so that the people would know what was going on. *[pauseeee]*

Isn't it such an amazing thing that God doesn't just make us sit in ignorance, but He takes steps to *speak* to us.

He is a God who reveals much about Himself and His plan of salvation to us, and here we see He not only spoke, but He came to us. *[pause]*

It's one thing for someone to call you up and speak to you, but it adds another layer when they take the time to visit.

And in this, we see the love of God on full display. *[pause]*

No matter how much love you feel from your family today on Christmas, you are loved more by the Lord.

No matter how little love you feel from your family today, you are loved by the Creator and Lord of all. *[pause]*

He wants us to know Him, He wants us to experience life and deliverance out of sin and death.

And he didn't merely come to the high up and elite, but he came to even the common shepherd. *[pause]*

This is because salvation doesn't belong to cultural elites alone, but it is available to all who would turn to Him in faith, no matter your background, ethnicity, or social status. *[pauseeee]*

Christmas is a continual reminder that God has visited His people in His Son.

Though we were in darkness and under death, Christ came to save. *[pauseeee]*

We are even told in this story that the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds, and they are immediately filled with fear.

Yet what do the angels say? "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." *[pause]*

This visitation of God was not for judgment, but for salvation!

It was to bring good news, not bad news.

And Christmas teaches us that there's still good news available to those who have never turned to Christ for salvation.

Christ has come, the Savior was born, and He went on to die for our sins and rise again.
[pauseee]

Fear is dispelled when you understand that God came to save.

Even though in politics, they thrive on creating fear in us, we do not need to fear.

Though you look around you, and see things that can be fearful, the Lord shows us that we do not need to fear, for there's good news of great joy amidst all the bad news of great despair.
[pauseee]

You see, the reason that they didn't need to fear was because of the content of the message: the Savior was born.

Love came down in the form of a baby, salvation had arrived, and it was gift wrapped with swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. [pause]

He who arrived was both Savior and Lord - He was the promised Messiah.

This wasn't the birth of a normal baby on a typical day, this was the birth of One who is beyond compare. [pause]

What good news!

A Savior being born meant deliverance, which leads to great joy and peace.

Why?

Because Jesus went on to live the perfect life that we could never live.

He then died for our sins, so that we could be forgiven and given eternal life.

And He rose again, conquering sin and death. [pause]

The joy comes with the truth that we can be declared "not guilty" in the sight of God.

The joy comes knowing that because we trust in Christ, we will not face condemnation, but we are set free from the penalty that we deserve. [pause]

We can approach God because God approached us in Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection!

No more separation because He drew near to save and we received His precious gift!

Guilty and condemnation are replaced by forgiveness and freedom.

What good news of great joy! [pause]

And this news also brings peace on earth, for we can have peace with God when we trust in Jesus Christ. *[pauseeee]*

What a gift!

Sometimes you give your child a gift on Christmas, and by the end of the day it's broken.

Or even as an adult, your Christmas gifts eventually wear out or get old.

Yet Jesus' birth is the gift that keeps giving because it gives us eternal joy and everlasting peace with God. *[pause]*

What a gift!

It wasn't a gift bought at the dollar store, or even at the most expensive store in the world.

The Lord gifted Himself to us. *[pauseeeee]*

If you think about it, our culture is focused on and consumed with gifts.

During Christmas, everyone is out and about purchasing gifts, and the commercials on TV and the ads on the internet are bombarding us with gift ideas. *[pause]*

There's of course nothing wrong with getting and giving gifts, we should!

But if the gifts of this world at Christmas are the only gifts that matter to us, then we are most to be pitied. *[pause]*

The gifts of this world are temporary, but Jesus Christ, given to us at Christmas, is the gift that eternally matters.

All other gifts pale in comparison. *[pauseeee]*

This is why we can have joy and peace, no matter what circumstances we face this Christmas.

For even though you don't get any gifts from others, you have received the best gift of all.

Even though every other person says they care about you, but they don't show it - God showed it.

And even though you may be alone on Christmas or after Christmas, you can remember that Christ came, and His name is Immanuel, which means "God with us."¹ *[pauseeee]*

God gave us the best gift, and much needed gift, for He gave us a much-needed Savior, out of love.

But what should be our response?...

¹ See Matthew 1:23.

II. Our Response: Joyful Praise! (15-20)

Whenever we give a gift, we like to see the response of the person that we gave the gift to.

We often look at their facial expressions, and listen to what they say about the gift.

If they say, “Well, well, well, now, there’s a gift!”

That’s probably a sign that they may not totally enjoy it.

Or if they say, “You shouldn’t have! No, really, I mean it, you really shouldn’t have!”²

That’s probably also a sign. *[pause]*

The truth is, we want to know if the person that we gave a gift to liked it or not, so we look at their response.

We’ll look at the shepherds’ response after hearing the good news of the birth of Jesus in verses 15-20...*[READ VERSE 15-20]*

The first thing that we see is that they trust in the news that was just shared with them.

They don’t have doubts about what the angel said, but rather, they say, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened.” *[pause]*

They believed that it happened, and now they wanted to see it in person. *[pause]*

When someone tells you that they had a baby, you don’t doubt the news, but you want to go see the baby in person.

So that’s what the shepherds do - they trust the news of Jesus’ birth. *[pause]*

Do you also trust the message that the Savior was born in Bethlehem?

We cannot go to Bethlehem and see the baby first-hand, but we can believe the news, just like the shepherds.

It will take faith, but the Lord has made it known to us, and His Word is always reliable. *[pauseeee]*

Not only did the shepherds trust the news, but they shared the news.

They go and see the baby, and then tell people what was told to them about the child. *[pause]*

The news was just too good to keep to themselves, they couldn’t help but tell others.

² This saying and the previous one come from:
<https://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/8-responses-to-weird-gifts>.

And this news leads people to wonder and amazement. *[pause]*

Are you willing to share the news of Jesus' birth?

God has likewise made it known to us through the Scriptures, but do we excitedly tell it to others?

Some people may reject the news, but others will wonder and ponder the message in their hearts.

Our job is to make it known. *[pause]*

We tell others about Christ during the Christmas season, helping to reorient their minds back to the reason that we celebrate.

But we also tell others about Christ all during the year. *[pauseeee]*

For many of us, we know the message of Christmas, and we know that we should be telling others about the news, but how do we get motivated to do so?

We must first be *captivated* by the news. *[pause]*

The shepherds were captivated and believed the news they received, which then led to proclaiming it.

So also, we must be captivated by it and believe it first, and when that really happens, we can't help but want others to know it.

The Savior of the world came to this earth and was born in a manger - what world-altering, life-changing news! *[pauseeee]*

The shepherds do one more thing in our passage.

After the shepherds see the baby and tell people what they heard from the angel, they return back to the fields.

But as they go back, they are "glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them." *[pause]*

They glorify and praise God for what He had done.

God said that the Savior was born, and they found him just as God described.

The Lord came through and deserved the glory for sending the gift of the Savior. *[pauseeee]*

Think about it this way: whoever gives the gift deserves the credit, and so God deserves all the glory.

This is why the angels praise God saying, "Glory to God in the highest."

He is worthy to be praised! *[pause]*

This is why when we celebrate Christmas, our focus should not be drawn away from the truth of the Incarnation.

Because God deserves the glory, praise, and honor for what He has done in Christ. *[pause]*

So often during Christmastime, our focus is pulled away from glorifying God and we instead glory in such smaller, unworthy, and trivial things.

We focus on the presents and shopping, the decorations, the food, the memories, and things like that.

Or sadly, many are fixed on Santa Claus.

But celebrating Christmas should mean we are saying along with the angels, “Glory to God in the highest!”

And praising and glorifying God along with the shepherds. *[pauseeee]*

So as we think about the response of the shepherds, they show us a clear action plan of response to the news of the Savior’s birth...

Trust the news, share the news, and praise God for the news.

That’s what we are called to do, but does joyful praise characterize your life as you think about the truth behind Christmas?

Will you continue this day in joyful praise to the Lord? *[pauseeee]*

As you can see...

Because the Savior came down, our praise goes up!

This is what we celebrate and remember during Christmas, and it’s easier to do on a day such as this, but what about after it’s all over? *[pause]*

In 2015, the *National Alliance on Mental Health* did a study that found that 64% of people experience the holiday blues.³

And that was pre-Covid, so the number is probably higher now. *[pause]*

But something that affects many people even more is not only the holiday blues during the holidays, but the holiday blues that come upon them after they are over.

So often, there’s this let down and sadness that comes over us once Christmas is all over.

³ <https://www.nami.org/blogs/nami-blog/november-2015/tips-for-managing-the-holiday-blues>.

Your family visitors leave, the decorations are taken down, the thrill of the presents wears out, and normal life resumes.

And the truth is: if Christmas is only about time with family, food, and presents then it will always bring disappointment after...

...But if it's about our Savior and what he gives us, then it won't disappoint because we have hope! *[pause]*

The way we can battle the let down of Christmas being over is we continue celebrating and praising our God for what He has done...

We remember how love came down for us.

We dwell upon the gift of our Savior, and what His coming and work accomplished for us.

We remember the joy and peace that we have in and because of Jesus.

The most important, eternal matters have been dealt with in Christ! *[pauseeee]*

When we trust in Christ, our hope is secure, for we have forgiveness and eternal life.

And that means that even if we lost everything, we would still have eternal life and we would still have Christ!

Though the joy of the holidays wears out, don't let this joy wear out, for it's the present that keeps on giving, all throughout the year! *[pause]*

So as you continue this Christmas Day, remember that our Savior came down.

Hope, life, joy, peace, and salvation came for us, so praise Him!

And continually say in your heart, "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!"⁴

⁴ 2 Corinthians 9:15.