

The Best Christmas Ever

Luke 1:26-55

December 23, 2007

Intro

Christmas is a wonderful time of year; that is if you can survive the stresses, the expectations, the busy-ness, and the traffic. There seems to be an expectation that we do it all or somehow Christmas won't be special. We want to have a great Christmas! Wouldn't it be perfect if it was a white Christmas morning and everyone got the perfect gift, and everyone got along? Then would it be the best Christmas ever?

The problem is that we too often focus on the 'atmosphere' of Christmas, which is very enjoyable, but forget that we can never improve on the very first Christmas, and the 'atmosphere' of the first one didn't exact smell like *chestnuts roasting on an open fire*.

God changed the world that day of Christ's birth and is still changing the world today; but He is changing it by what he does in the soul – one at a time.

In Luke 1, we read of Mary's heart when she responds first, to the angel announcing that she would carry the Son of God, and then later to her cousin Elizabeth. In these words, we see a response to what the Lord has done that touches the heart of what God wants to do in us as well.

I. Nothing Will Be Impossible with God

- Verse 37 – The angel assures Mary that God will do what he said he would do. Elizabeth will have a child in her old age as evidence of God's power.

A. Live according to His Word

- Mary responds to the angel by saying, "Let it be done according to your word."

- The world is lost and is headed in a direction that's away from heaven, not toward it.

Ephesians 2:12, "remember that at that time you were separate from Christ ... without hope and without God in the world."

- But when we live according to His Word, it gives godly, heavenly direction to our lives.
- The direction is away from who we used to be and toward who God wants us to be in Christ.
- We love Christmas stories and one of the things that make them powerful is when someone is changed.

Illus – Ebenezer Scrooge, *"If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with "Merry Christmas" on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He should!"*
– A Christmas Carol (Charles Dickens)

But the story is powerful only because Scrooge is transformed from a miserly, selfish, cold-hearted, lonely man into a generous, loving, and warm-hearted friend.

- In John 4, there is a powerful story of transformation when the Samaritan woman meets Jesus.

John 4:41-42, Many more believed because of His word; and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world."

B. Change must begin in the soul

- In verses 46-47, Mary says that her soul exalts and her spirit rejoices. Real and lasting change will not happen without the transformation of the soul.
- The Catholic Church believes that Mary was without sin as Jesus was, but notice in verse 47 that she says, “*God my Savior.*”
- “My savior” is personal. We must have a personal relationship with Christ, not someone else’s.

Illus – Mark Lowry wrote a song that captures a beautiful thought in this regard...”Mary Did You Know? That your baby boy has come to make you new? This child that you’ve delivered would soon deliver you.”

- God offers, we must accept. It’s a question of the soul.

Illus – The third verse of “O Little Town of Bethlehem”

How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given! So God imparts to human hearts, the blessing of His heaven.

No ear may hear His coming, But in this world of sin, Where meek souls will receive Him still, The dear Christ enters in.

John 1:12-13, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Ezekiel 36:26-27, “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”

C. A changed heart will give

- When we’re young it’s all about what we get.

Illus – I remember when I was young and couldn’t sleep because I was dreaming about what I would get for Christmas.

- When you get older, you spend much more time thinking about what you will give to others.

Illus – A gift is made valuable by the heart behind it.

If a husband brings a gift for his wife, but has an attitude with it, it has little meaning, if any at all.

- When people first come to the Lord, they often focus on what they want God to do for them.
- But then there comes a time, when we realize that we are to exchange gifts with God. We have received so much; therefore we want to give in return.

Matthew 2:11, “After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.”

- Each gift recognized who He was:
 - **Gold**; for a king
 - **Frankincense**; and expensive element of the priest's incense and anointing oil. It is obtained by slashing the Boswellia tree and allowing the resin to bleed out into tears. The tree has the unusual ability to grow on solid stone.
 - **Myrrh**; gathered from the cuts of Myrrh tree, used in embalming, mixed with wine it was offered to Jesus on the cross (but refused), was used in anointing His body after death. This gift recognizes His death, which was the reason He came.

II. God Wants to Change Your Desires

- Mary exclaims that she exalts the Lord; that her soul rejoices in God. Then later in verse 53 she exclaims that **“He has filled the hungry with good things.”**
- However, there is another theme running through these verses as well. *“He has scattered those who were proud,” “He has brought down rulers,” He sent away the rich empty-handed (those who think they need nothing).”*

A. Worldly desires cannot satisfy

- The desiring of the world is worldly.
- But there is a principle of the diminishing return; it takes more and more of the same thing to bring that rush.

Romans 6:21, Therefore, what benefit did you gain from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death.

- We are driven by our desires and **what we desire has everything to do with who we are and who we will become.**

Proverbs 18:1, He who separates himself seeks his own desire, he quarrels against all sound wisdom.

- But there is an answer; the freedom that comes from Christ.

Acts 13:38-39, “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.”

B. Jesus is the Joy of Man's Desiring

Illus – Tis the season to be... what are we supposed to do the rest of the year?

- The theme of the season is to joyful and there are many things about this “wonderful time of year” that make it easy to be happy.

Illus – The smell of pine needles, the taste of eggnog, all the lights on the houses, the Christmas songs, etc all make this season a wonderful time of year.

- It's very easy to forget that the reason we have Christmas is because we need a Savior.

Luke 2:10-11, But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Illus – J.S. Bach wrote a masterpiece called, Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring, and absolutely beautiful piece that we love at Christmas. It is often done slowly and reverently, but he wrote it to be joyfully and majestically to reflect the Joy of Man’s Desiring.

- He saved us because he loves us. “God so loved the world...”
- There is also a joy that comes simply from being in the presence of the Lord, and there is a heaviness that comes from being away from Him.

John 15:9, 11, “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love...These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”

C. The joy of the Lord is our strength

- Mary’s psalm speaks of all the things the Lord had done for her. Vs 49, 51, and 53.
- And we can say the same thing. What a wonderful response to the Lord, recognizing the great things the Lord has done.
- All other major religions of the world have man saving himself by his own works; only faith in Christ gives us “the greatest gift of all” eternal life simply by faith.

Illus – We used to sing a very simple praise song with the words, “The Lord, has done great things for us... for he has filled our mouths with laughter, filled our tongues with singing, the Lord has done great things for us.”

Psalm 126:1-3, “When the Lord brought back the captive ones of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with joyful shouting; Then they said among the nations, ‘The Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for us; and we are glad.’”