

The Gifts of Christmas

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Preacher: Pastor Bart Leger

[0 : 00] Do you sometimes feel like Charlie Brown? You know, in the midst of Christmas, you go to all the shopping and maybe the mall and Christmas decorations that have been up since Halloween, and you're hearing all these Christmas songs in your head over and over and over again and all the Christmas parties and all the things that go along with that.

Do you ever feel like Charlie Brown and you just want to shout, Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about? I'm sure you've seen the classic TV special, A Charlie Brown Christmas. It's been airing since 1965. It's been around for so long, and that's a pretty good run, especially for a cartoon that was produced or an animated show that was produced on a low budget that was basically a last-minute production schedule for animation.

It all came about because Coca-Cola wanted a Christmas special to sponsor that year, and the cartoon Peanuts was wildly popular then, and so they approached the creator, Charles Schultz, the creator of Peanuts, asking for a meeting and for some ideas.

Well, the Peanuts creator, Charles Schultz, and the producers got together, and they created the outline for the entire show in one single day, and that's pretty well unheard of, and the Coke executives went for it.

[1 : 48] But Schultz had some pretty unorthodox ideas, like playing jazz music for a cartoon, and no laugh track. Laugh tracks were pretty much ubiquitous.

They were almost on every show they had laugh tracks during that time, and Schultz said no. And there was another thing. Schultz was most adamant that the show would present the story of the birth of Jesus.

And as a matter of fact, he wanted a scene that was read straight from the Bible. The producers worried that reading from the Bible might be a little bit too controversial for airing on national television, but Schultz insisted.

He said, if you're going to use my cartoon, you're going to do it my way. Well, the Coca-Cola executives went with it, and I think you could say the show's done pretty well.

Every year since 1965. You've probably seen it a time or two. I know I've seen it a number of times down through the years, or has been playing somewhere where you go.

[3 : 00] And even in the midst of all the trappings of Christmas, and the tinsel, and the trees, and the lights, and the songs, Charlie Brown had gotten to the point where he came up empty.

And we see him wondering aloud about what Christmas is all about, and his best friend Linus. He's got his blanket with his thumb in his mouth, and Charlie Brown was saying, does anyone really know what Christmas is all about? Linus takes his thumb out of his mouth, he drops his blanket, and he said, I'll tell you, Charlie Brown.

And he goes to the stage, and Linus says, lights please. Spotlight shows on Linus. And he reads probably one of the most poignant scenes in TV.

He reads, And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping their watch over their flock by night.

[4 : 08] And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

And it's in these words that Charlie Brown finds hope, and it's where the whole Christmas experience turns for him, and he realizes the true meaning of Christmas.

[5 : 17] And he goes from being depressed and inwardly focused and questioning to outwardly sharing the scene, the Christmas story with others.

And all of a sudden it makes sense to him that this was about Jesus. And so today I want to invite us into these same words of hope as we come into this season preparing, as we near the time when we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

And over the next three weeks we're going to unwrap the gifts of Christmas, the gifts that we have because of Jesus Christ, because of his birth and his ultimate crucifixion, his death, his burial, and his resurrection.

And it's going to be a chance to listen to the stories, to remember the true meaning of Christmas. I don't necessarily so much have a problem when people in the stores now tell you happy holidays, because I know what it means.

And so many of them would rather say Merry Christmas or Jesus is the reason for the season. But we know what it all means and that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

[6 : 32] God didn't want anyone to perish, but that all would come to be a part of his family. And he knew that would have to come through a Savior. And it would have to be a Savior who could pay the penalty for sin for the entire world.

And he knew that he had to be a deity and he had to be fully man. And that was Jesus Christ. And I think the point is not necessarily that we get rid of all the trappings and all the traditions and the celebrations around us, but that we would take a purposeful journey through them.

I know many families have different traditions. Many families have different things that you do during the Christmas season. And I think as long as we take those and realize that there is a greater meaning, just as in the Old Testament, God left symbols and God left signs and God left traditions for his people.

But they all had a greater meaning. They all had a greater purpose. And the purpose was not just for the tradition. The purpose was that the tradition should point to someone and it was Jesus Christ.

So everything we do should point to Jesus. And everything we do should be an opportunity for us with our families to teach and to train. This is about Jesus. And this is why we do this.

[7 : 53] Or this is what this can symbolize for us. It's about Jesus. And we know that Jesus Christ brought gifts to the world. The gift of hope, the gift of love, the gift of joy, and the gift of peace.

And we're going to cover three of those over the next few weeks. And then on this year, when does Christmas fall? On Sunday.

So Sunday morning, December the 25th, we are going to be gathered together and we're going to celebrate the greatest gift of all, Jesus, who came to earth to be our Savior.

So as we unwrap each gift over the next few weeks, my hope is that we discover together that we can trust Emmanuel, God with us.

And so what we're going to do is we're going to look at the hope of Christmas. Now when we hear hope today, what are some ways in which we hear hope?

[9 : 00] I hope I get the job. I hope it doesn't rain. I hope you get to feeling better. I hope he shows up. I hope this happens. And when we think about it, do you notice a theme?

You know, worldly hope is characterized by doubt, by uncertainty, by a lack of control. And most of the time, when people use the word hope today, you know, they hope something happens.

They wish that something would happen. We hope for things that may or may not happen. And so, it's not the same as the hope that we have in Jesus Christ, the hope we have in God.

Because the hope that we have, when the Bible talks about our Christian hope, it is not a, I think it may happen, or I would like for it to happen, and it's not a sure thing.

Our hope is a guarantee. Our hope is a sure thing. The hope that we have in Jesus Christ. It's a no-so hope, rather than a hope-so hope.

[10 : 07] So, let's unwrap this gift of hope, by looking at hope past, hope present, and hope future. So, we look at hope in the past.

Have there been things that you've been waiting for, for a long time? And I was talking to someone this morning. They've been waiting for something, for three years. That's a long time.

Some of you may have been waiting for something, for longer than that. Some of you are still waiting, for certain things. Now, Israel, had a long history of waiting. They waited thousands of years, for their promised Messiah. Their entire history, was marked by waiting, and by looking forward, to a Messiah that would come, and would set things right for them, and set them free.

The Old Testament, is full of prophecies, about the Messiah. Isaiah 7, 14. Stuart referred to that, and read that, or quoted that, this morning.

[11:11] It is one example, of those Old Testament prophecies. Isaiah 7, 14. Therefore, the Lord himself, will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call, his name, Emmanuel.

There is another, well-known, prophet, a promise, from Isaiah. For unto us, a child is born. Isaiah 9, 6. Unto us, a son is given, and the government, will be, upon his shoulder.

And his name, will be called, Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God. And we talked about, the names of Jesus. One name would not suffice. Every name of Jesus, has a meaning.

And it, it refers to, one of his, part of his character, or part of, his, his nature. And these, and other prophecies, give us a clear expectation, of the promised Messiah, that would come for them, and for us today.

We know that, that he did come. But you know, the promise didn't always, make the waiting easy. The promise didn't always, make the waiting easy.

[12:20] And as we prepare, for the come, for the celebration, of the coming of Jesus, this Christmas, we share in that hope, of Israel. But like most of them, we have situations, that aren't working out, the way you'd like, for them to work out.

We have, we may have situations, in our life, that, that we may still be, be waiting on, and going through periods, of difficulty, in our life. That might be health problems, it might be financial issues, it might be job issues, relationship issues.

And like them, we still wait, for the complete fulfillment, of the hope. that we have. Now we know, that many of the prophecies, were fulfilled, when Jesus came.

I didn't look up, the exact number, but there were, quite a large number, of prophecies, that were fulfilled, in Jesus' coming. Where he would be born, where he would end up living, all the things, that would happen, how he would be born, what were the circumstances, of his birth.

But there are others, that are yet to be completed. There are others, that we are still, waiting on. So, we can be purposeful, this Advent season, as we prepare, as we wait, and as we look, at future promises.

[13:40] Hebrews chapter 11, verse 1 says, everlasting father, excuse me, Hebrews 11, verse 1 says, now faith is the substance, of things hoped for, the evidence, of things, not seen.

See, until Jesus Christ, comes back, our bodies, and this whole world, is waiting, for the fulfillment, of the promises.

The Bible says, even the earth, is waiting, for Jesus to come back, because the earth, is part of his creation. And we can find confidence, in Jesus's, coming arrival, eventually.

But we can, there's assurance, that there's way, way more, to come. So we have the confident hope. There was hope past.

Prophesied Jesus would come. Jesus came. God's word is always true, and always right. And then we look at hope, present. What about the hope today? You know, because this is where we live.

[14:47] This is, the things that we experience. We experience things, in the, in the now, in the moment. In the first chapter of Luke, we see, Jesus's birth, foretold again.

But unlike the Old Testament, prophecies, what we see, in Luke, there's a much more, personal, and there's a much more, imminent foretelling.

And that's when the angel Gabriel, comes to Mary, and tells her, what would happen. Luke chapter 1, verses 36 to 38.

It's a bit of a long, section here. Now when the sixth month, the angel Gabriel, was sent by God, to a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed, to a man, whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.

The virgin's name, was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you, among women.

[15 : 47] But when she saw him, like everyone else, that ever seen an angel, she was troubled, at his saying, consider what manner, of greeting that was. I mean, an angel shows up to you, and says, Mary, you are blessed, among women, and she's going, well you know what, there's something else, that's going to come, after that.

And she considered, what manner the greeting was, verse 30. Then the angel said to her, do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favor, with God. Now, hopefully like you, or like Mary, I hope that we would be able, to hear that from God, that we have found favor, with him.

Because of our heart, because of our character, because of our, our love for him. And I'm sure Mary, was waiting, for the fulfillment, of the Old Testament prophecies.

Mary, because she found favor, with God, would have been waiting, and expecting, the coming of her Messiah. And so the angel, Gabriel, comes to her, and says, you are blessed, among women, for you have found favor, with God, and behold, you will conceive, in your womb, and bring forth, a son, and shall call, his name, Jesus.

He will be great, and will be called, the son of the highest, and the Lord God, will give him the throne, of his father, David. And he will reign, over the house of Jacob, forever.

[17 : 14] And all of his kingdom, and of his kingdom, there will be, no end. Now, in the midst of life's questions, in the midst of all, everything, would you, wouldn't you like, wish that Gabriel, would come to you, and tell you, what's going to happen, in the future?

Well, maybe. Because look at what, Mary goes on to say, in verse 34, that Mary said to the angel, well how can this be, since I don't know a man, I haven't had any, physical relationships, with a man.

So, how can I get pregnant? This is not, that doesn't make any sense. Verse 35, the angel answered, and said to her, the Holy Spirit, will come upon you, and the power of the highest, will overshadow you, therefore also, that holy one, who is to be born, will be called, the son of God. Now, indeed, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son, in her old age, now this is called, and this is now, the sixth month, for her, who was called barren, for with God, nothing will be, impossible.

Then Mary said, behold, the maidservant, of the Lord, let it be, to me, according to your word, and the angel, departed, from, her.

[18 : 34] So, what was Mary told? You're going to have a child, it's going to come from, through the Holy Spirit's, operation, through the Holy Spirit's work, work.

And this Jesus, that, that I've told you, he said, he will be, the mighty one, he will be the king, he is the promised Messiah, that you have been waiting for, Mary.

And so, thankfully, Mary responded, in faith, she pondered those things, in her heart, and then she went through, with what, what she was told to do, and today, we hold fast, to that same hope, that this Jesus, that was born in Bethlehem, in that manger, as the song says, in a lowly estate, and he, is the promised king, the promised Messiah, and he, is going to ultimately, set things, right.

So as we, we sit here today, the present hope, that you have, may not seem, to be making a difference, but things, are happening. God is working, in each of our lives, if we know Christ, as our Savior, God is working, in our lives.

This doesn't mean, change isn't happening, it doesn't mean, God isn't working, behind the scenes, it doesn't mean, that God's not working, through people. You know, we hear testimony, over and over, and over again, how something, that we do, or something, that we say, might have an impact, weeks, months, or even years, later.

[20 : 03] God is at work, see his timing, is not our timing. I'm sure, the Old Testament, God's Old Testament people, would have said, well God, Jehovah, why don't just, why don't you just, send the Messiah?

You know, why do I have, why do we have to wait, for our great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, grandchildren, to wait, to see the Messiah? And then, Israel didn't even accept, their Messiah, when he came.

Isn't that something? We've been going, through on Sunday nights, through the Gospel of John, and this, tonight, we're going to be, beginning, chapter 19, I think it's verses 18, and following, or, where we left off, last week, and we come to the point, where Pilate, gives, him over, to the Jews, if you will, and he, Jesus Christ, is going to be crucified, and just like the Apostles, the Apostles Creed, says, Jesus Christ, was crucified, dead, and buried, and that's what we're going, to be

looking at, this evening, in the Gospel of John.

So the Jews, waited, for all of these centuries, for the coming, of the Messiah, and were wondering, is anything happening? Maybe today, your hope present is, well, things aren't happening, fast enough.

God's still at work. Just know, that the same hope, that was given to the Jews, the same hope, that was given to Mary, is given to us today, that Jesus Christ, is the wonderful counselor, Jesus Christ, is the King of Kings, and is the Lord, of Lords.

[21 : 47] Look at Hebrews, with me, chapter 6, verse 19, Hebrews, 6, and verse, 19, this, hope, we have, this hope, in Jesus Christ, this hope, this hope, for our salvation, this hope, for Jesus Christ, coming back, and setting things right, again, one day, this hope, we have, as an anchor, of the soul, it's both sure, and steadfast, and which enters, the presence, behind the veil, our present hope, in Jesus, doesn't mean, that we're not, we're not going, to go through, storms, in our life, our present hope, in Jesus, doesn't mean, that you and I, will not have to go, through difficult times, just like, the recent series, we went through, that God uses, things in our life, and he brings us, sometimes, he puts us, in the crucible, he heats it up, so that, that we can be purified, and that we can, come forth, as gold, so, our present hope, doesn't mean, that we're not, going to go, through difficult times, but like an anchor, holds a ship, steady, against the wind, and the waves, our hope, that we have, in Christ today, can secure us, in the midst of life, storms, you know, it's amazing, to hear, the testimonies, of people, who are going, through difficult times, whose faith, is in Jesus Christ, you know, they will say, things are tough, there's, there's,

I'm in pain, things are, are really hard, and difficult, right now, or maybe they've lost, a loved one, and it's not easy, to move forward, they say, but, God, I know God is with me, I know God is sustaining me, I know God is giving me, the grace to get through, day, by day, by day, by day, because, God, God's mercies are new, every morning, and he's able to provide, for us, so let, this season, be one, of, secure hope, in the midst, of all, that we're going through, all of the, all of the insecurities, of our, of our world today, all of the things, that are happening, financially, politically, we can hold on, to that secure hope, that anchor, of the soul, is Jesus Christ, so when things, seem to be falling apart, around you, let the hope of Jesus, let our hope in Jesus, anchor you, and while the whole world, around you, is drifting, back and forth, you can be steadfast, and sure, knowing that Jesus, is God, he died on the cross, in your place, he is coming back, he will take us, to be with him, and then ultimately, he is going to set foot, back on planet earth, at his second coming, and he's going to ultimately, eventually, set things right, and we think about, that brings us, into our hope, future, you know, while our focus, leading up to the time, when we celebrate, the birth of Jesus, and his arrival, in the world, is still future, you know, it's not just preparing, our hearts, for this Christmas season, but it's also preparing, our hearts, for the coming of Jesus, we ask ourselves, the question, are we ready, you know, there's a lot, of debate, about when the Lord, is coming back, about when the rapture, will take place, you know, that, that, that, that, that, that, what is talked about, in Thessalonians, about when the Lord,

Jesus Christ, would come in the air, and receive us, we're going through, the book of the revelations, for Sunday school, and, and so, there, there's so many different groups, that will say, you know, the Lord Jesus, is going to come back, for his church, before, the, the great tribulation, some will say, well, he's going to come back, during the middle, of the tribulation, there's some, they'd say, well, he'll come back, at the end, of the tribulation, and, and you know what, the fact of the matter, is, we need to be ready, for whenever, Jesus chooses, to return, are we going to be, serving him, working for him, and are we going, to be about his business, when he chooses, to return, our hope lies, in Jesus Christ, and so we wait, placing our hope, for him, in the past, the present, and the future, and, you know, it's the, it's the bigger picture, of our faith, and God's plans, for our world, the apostle Paul, explained in,

Romans chapter 8, verses 24 and 25, as we, as we wind, this gift of hope down, for we were saved, in this hope, but hope, that is seen, is not hope, I mean, if someone shows it to you, I mean, it's not, that's not faith, you know, that's, that's sight, you see it, so there's, there's no faith involved, so Paul says, for we were saved, in this hope, but hope, that is seen, is not hope, for why does one, still hope, for what he actually, sees, but if we hope, for what we do not see, we eagerly, wait for it, with perseverance, so are we truly, waiting, for Jesus to return, or are we so busy, in the trappings of, Christmas, that it's all about, the tinsel, it's all about, the gift giving, it's all about, the Christmas carols, and for some people, that's all there is, for Christmas, or that's all there is, about Christmas,

and the way,

Charlie Brown was, can anyone tell me, the real meaning, of Christmas, this can't be, all it is, just a festival, of trees, and lights, and tinsel, and carols, and so Linus, as he goes up, on the stage, and he reads, the Christmas story, that's what it's all about, so this Christmas season, let's, let's not, we don't have to give up, all of our traditions, but let's realize, their meaning, and that for which, they stand, so no matter what, the department stores, tell you, Christmas, hadn't yet arrived, and it is, all about Jesus, and Jesus, is the real reason, for this season, that we celebrate, so this, period of Advent, season of preparation, period of expectation, and waiting, you know, see, there's value, as well, as excitement, in patient waiting, because it's almost, as if, the excitement, builds, for Jesus's return, and we get more, and more ready, for him to return, and when he comes,

[28 : 48] I believe, our world will truly be ready, for his presence, so may this season, be a season, where, we appreciate, the gifts of Christmas, hope, love, joy, and peace, let's pray, Father, Father, this morning, we thank you, for your goodness, we thank you, for all that you're doing, in our lives, and Father, we praise you, for the hope, that is ours, in Jesus, and we, we pray Lord, that you would help us, to be able to share that, that faith, with others, and that, you provided a way, for us to know, for sure, that we are, a part of your family, and Father, we thank you, for this offering, that we are about to receive, may you use it, for your honor, thank you.