

Gifts for a Newborn

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[0 : 00] While you're still standing, let's pray. Father, I ask that you open our hearts this morning so that your word might go deep into it.

In Christ's name, Amen. Grab a seat. Oh, good morning, folks. Good morning. Lovely to be here on Christmas morning, isn't it?

In New Zealand, where I'm from, we have quite a beach culture. You know, surf, sun and sand. And so my friends always wanted to go to the beach.

And I was always quite hesitant because I'm a redhead. And so I'm quite pale. In fact, it's not even that I'm white.

I'm actually light blue. And so I was always a bit embarrassed going to the beach. And one day I thought I came up with a brilliant plan.

[0 : 59] And that was I'll become a surfer. Because surfers wear, you know, wetsuits. And I could cover up my pasty complexion with a wetsuit. So I went to this place called Pihar.

Which, if you know New Zealand at all, it's a famous surfing beach. And I didn't realize this, but it's notoriously dangerous. And so my friends said, oh, yeah, we'll teach you how to surf at Pihar. I thought, that sounds wonderful.

So they lent me a wetsuit and a surfboard. And they just sort of sent me off into the surf. They just said, oh, well, just head out there and just paddle around and see how you go.

So I went out. And what I didn't realize is that there's a huge rip at Pihar. And a rip is like a current, this undercurrent that drags you out or sideways.

And this rip was unusual because it just dragged you sideways. And so I'm paddling out. And then when I look over my shoulder towards the safety of the beach, there is this, at one end of the beach where no one goes, there are all these rocks sticking out.

[2 : 03] A huge, like about the width of this church, these jagged rocks sticking out, right? And so the rip had caught me, me not realizing it because I'm looking at the horizon. And I'd been dragged across.

And I look behind me. And there's the jagged rocks and then the beach. And these waves start coming and start pounding me and pushing me towards these jagged rocks. And I'm trying to remain calm.

And I'm trying to paddle against the rip. And then out of nowhere, this guy turns up on a surfboard and he says, you know, are you in trouble? I will rescue you.

He wasn't actually German. But he was a Kiwi, but this sounds a lot more dramatic when he's German.

You need to paddle. And I've got these little skinny little arms. It's like little toothpicks in the water. But he had these, and he could see I'm not going to be able to do anything about this.

[3 : 06] So he goes, you know, grab my, grab my toe, my, what do you call those things that attach you to the surfboard? The foot rope thing? He goes, grab a hold of that. And so I grabbed a hold of it.

And he just starts, you know, with his big German shoulders. You know. And his arms were like paddles, you know, pounding. And he got me out of trouble.

And as we're going out there, he says, Aaron, you need to paddle. You know, your life depends on it. And it was true. Like it was a really dodgy situation. Now I tell you that story because Christmas is about a lot of things.

But one of the big things that it's about is rescue. Is God coming to rescue us? Our reading today, it's the quintessential Christmas image, isn't it?

And we've got one up here. It's the baby Jesus, three wise men, you know, the manger, the animals. And it's beautiful. It's lovely. It's very picturesque, exotic sort of oriental men bringing exotic gifts to Christ.

[4 : 12] But I think the image and the story suffers from being so beautiful and pretty. And it suffers from being so popular and familiar to us because it can take our focus away from what is a really heavy thing about Christmas.

And the big deal about Christmas is God has come to rescue us. And our passage this morning answers two questions about that rescue. The first question is why do we need rescuing? And the second is how does that rescue take place? Firstly, why do we need rescuing? Well, it's summed up in the picture of King Herod in this passage.

King Herod, a deeply insecure man. King Herod, a deeply insecure man.

Three of his sons, half the Jewish council, all to protect his power. And when he heard about the prophecies about this king of the Jews being born, he tricked the Magi and the three wise men into finding out where he was so he could kill this child as well.

[5 : 47] So Herod viewed this child as a threat. And humanity needs rescuing because like Herod, we can view God as a threat to our authority.

We want to be the God of our own lives. We want to be the ones who gets to say what's right and what's wrong in our life. And this attitude separates us from God.

And there's nothing we can do to close that gap. So why do we need rescuing? I'll say it again.

Because on the throne of our hearts, instead of King Jesus, for some people, instead of King Jesus, we have put a usurper, we have put ourselves, and we aren't doing a very good job.

Now you might be thinking, goodness, this is a bit heavy and depressing for Christmas morning.

What about the baby Jesus? Isn't that pretty and nice? Well, yes, you're right. It's very pretty and it's very nice and it's wonderful and it's great and it's fabulous news.

But it's only good news if you know how big a hole you were in that God rescued you from. So that's why I want to talk about this a little bit here. Okay, but let's get to the good news.

[6 : 57] So why do we need rescuing? Well, because we're separated from God. And how will that rescue take place? How will we be rescued?

Well, that's found in a very interesting place in the passage. It's found in the gifts that were given to Jesus.

Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These gifts tell us something very important about this baby. Three very important things about this baby. The first gift is gold.

Now, what I'm going to say next is going to sound like I'm leading into a joke, but it's not a joke, right? So a friend of mine went to a circumcision recently. He has a... I know. He has these Jewish friends, right?

And they had a little baby boy and the boy was going to be circumcised. And they're Orthodox Jews. And so he went to the circumcision. And it's a really big deal, like this whole liturgy that goes around it.

[7 : 56] And he said it was fascinating, very, very interesting. But my friends who are Kiwis and not Jewish, they made a bit of a cultural faux pas.

They bought a gift for the child and they brought a physical present, like a book or a toy or something. And I think the parents were grateful, but it was a bit odd.

Because what my friends were expecting from all their people that were attending, or what the parents of the circumcised child, what they expected from everyone coming and what everyone else brought were shares bought in the name of the child.

And that's what these folks did. So they buy, like, stocks. You know, like, people buy blue chip shares. S-H-A-R-E-S. Because I can see people looking at each other going, what's he saying now?

I can't understand a way. Have you gotten anything he said? I heard Jesus and that's good. And we know he's on track. So my friends were talking to this Jewish lady afterwards.

[9 : 06] And she said, yes, traditionally, you buy blue chip stocks for the child, like shares in IBM or Coke or Apple or Microsoft.

And then she said, it's very nice for the baby. Because, you know, when they're 21, they have a couple of hundred thousand dollars. And my friend's like, yes, that would be nice, wouldn't it, for them when they're 21.

Now, back to the story of gold here, okay. So, one of the wise men bought gold for Jesus. Now, it wasn't like my Jewish friends who are very clever buying shares for this baby so they get a good start in life.

It wasn't like we're bringing gold for this child so that, you know, he can pay for woodworking school and get a little house of his own, etc. No. So, in the Bible, gold is associated with kingship.

In 1 Kings 10, the Queen of Sheba visits Solomon and brings him gold. When Joseph is made the ruler of Egypt, he gets a big gold necklace. See, gold is something you bring to a king.

[10:11] This gift, gold, says something about this child. And it says this child is a king. So, I've already said this, but it's worth repeating.

Rescue means a just king to rule over the earth and put things right. A king to replace us on the throne of our hearts.

So, that's what the first gift says. The second gift, incense. Frankincense. Now, incense was used in temple worship. In Exodus 30, God orders Moses to build an altar and burn incense of it.

And the passage in verse 6 says, This is the place where I, God, will meet my people. So, this gift says this. It is through Jesus that God will be with his people again.

So, rescue not only means a rightful king in his rightful place, but a king that wants to meet with us, a king that wants to be with us, so much so that this king is willing to be born into this world, vulnerable, fragile little baby.

[11:22] Now, the last gift is probably the most confronting, myrrh. Myrrh speaks of death, because myrrh was an embalming fluid for dead bodies.

So, this last gift represents how the relationship with King Jesus is going to take place. And myrrh tells us that this baby that's been born is born to die. And it's very confronting, isn't it?

In this nativity scene we have over here, one of the gifts is saying, is saying that, you know, from the moment you were born, Jesus, you are heading for the cross.

So, at Jesus' birth, we are brought face to face with the truth of the gospel, one of the big truths of the gospel, and that is that Christianity is not about getting a moral education.

It's not about being nice to each other. It's about the good news of what Jesus Christ has done. And what he has done is that he has been born into this world to die for our sins.

[12:30] And he has to do that, because at the center of God's character is a hatred of evil. And God cannot sweep that evil under the carpet.

He cannot pretend it doesn't exist. But Jesus took the punishment for that evil upon himself, because evil must be punished for God to be good.

But he took that punishment for himself. So lastly, rescue means Jesus, born to take the punishment for us on the cross.

Well, let's close up here. A child is born, a king, a mediating priest, a sacrifice. And Christmas is a wonderful time to remember these things.

But in the sentimentality of it all, in the family dramas and romanticism and exoticness of Christmas, let us not forget the challenge.

[13:31] And the challenge is this. Will we be like Herod? Will we do anything to desperately try and hang on to power, to try and claim authority over our lives?

Or will we be like the Magi, the three wise men, and kneel before the manger, and worship the real king, surrender our lives to him?

That is the challenge of Christmas. And that's what I'd love, if that's the thing that came to your mind, when you looked at your nativity scene. Amen.

Amen.