

A **SON** is **Given**

Isaiah 9, Luke 2

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When I was a child, I remember going to bed Christmas Eve with one thing on my mind. Presents! And all eight of us brothers and sisters would wake up really early Christmas morning. Why do you think that might be? The presents! But Christmas is about so much more than the gifts ... or is it?

The prophet Isaiah said, "*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given ...*" Given. That's *gift* language. A child is born. We all get that, right? It happens all the time. Children are born every day around the world. But "a son given"? Now that's something different. That doesn't happen every day. A son as a gift, to be given to another.

In chapter two, Luke begins talking about a birth. A child is born. Not a big deal in and of itself. The first seven verses give the details. *In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn [guest room].*

A child is born. From what we can see, not that unusual. But then, something *else* happens. Something very, very, different. And it's not so much what we see that matters, though it was quite a sight to see. It's what we *hear*, that's shocking! Not what we expect. Not said about *any* other baby who's ever been born! And you'd never know it, unless you were *told*. Someone's got to tell you. It's isn't at all obvious by *looking*. You've got to *listen*.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear!

Now if God has a message, who's He going to give it to? It's only natural to expect that it would be given to those who understand that sort of thing: the theologians, or the priests who have charge of His affairs. But no, His message is given to those least likely to be told, shepherds. A rough bunch. Notorious for their bad church attendance. (Norman Nagel)

When the angel appears to them, they're scared to death! Who wouldn't be? The pure brilliance of light signaled the presence of God! "*The glory of the Lord shone round about them.*" The field was flooded with light – brilliant, dazzling. Not the town, but the field was lighted up. Why didn't the angel go to Jerusalem? There, was the worship established by God. There, were the princes of the people and the rulers in both Church and State. There, were the Temple and the high priests ordained of God. Why didn't the angel go to them? He went to Bethlehem, a dung heap compared with Jerusalem ... And he didn't go to the town of Bethlehem but to the shepherds. (from *The Martin Luther Christmas Book*)

God went to fishermen. God went to the women at the well. The demon-possessed. The sick. The paralytic who needed to be carried to Jesus. The women caught in adultery. A dead girl. To Lazarus' grave. The man who didn't deserve to have Jesus come into his home. The foreigner, the outsider, the outcast. Tax-collectors and prostitutes. The lost. The angel comes to you and me.

All of these knew what was coming. They all expected to hear the bad news, because of who they were. Yet in their total shock, good news instead! Good news, not of who *they* were, but who *Jesus* was. *And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!"* And the shepherd's phobia of God's messengers (*fearing with a great fear*) vanished. And instead, they rejoiced with a great joy! And so should you.

And this will be a sign for you. This is how you know you're in the right place. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." Well, that's a bit unusual! The swaddling clothes, yes. We get that. A baby wrapped up nice and tight. We still do that today. But lying in a manger? Now that's something different. You don't see that every day. And He's the Savior! Lying in a manger, instead of a palace?

A baby was born. Anyone could see that. But, "a son is given"? There was no way of knowing that. Unless ... someone told you that. And who would ever tell you such a thing? Who knew? Only God. You wouldn't know, unless He told you. *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 among those with whom His favor rests!"*

Picture the shepherds like children on Christmas morning, upstairs in their bedroom, thrilled with wonder, *waiting* to dash downstairs and tear open their gifts. And yet, the shepherds weren't about to wait til morning. A gift was waiting for them! Not under a tree, but in the city.

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

A baby. A baby *for them*. A son given *to them*. A gift, *for them*. A Savior, *for them!*

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ... But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ ... For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2)

And so the angel announces, not just to the shepherds, but to *you* this night, "*fear not!*" How *wonderful* to hear those words! For what have you done this year that should trouble you and cause you fear? How you've hurt others? Neglected to help your neighbor? Lost your temper. Said things you shouldn't have. Thought things you wouldn't want anyone else to know. Were unwilling to forgive. Acted in doubt, instead of faith. Worried, instead of trusted.

Fear not. A Son is *given*. And those soft little hands, fashioned by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb, would one day have nails driven through them. Those baby feet, pink and unable to walk, would one day walk up a dusty hill to be nailed to a cross. That sweet infant's head with sparkling eyes would one day have a crown of thorns forced on it. That tender body, warm and soft, wrapped in swaddling clothes, would one day be whipped and speared.

A Son is given, to rescue you. To end the division between you and God caused by your sin. *Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy!* God's message to you tonight is not a message of judgment and condemnation. But a message of peace. "*The wages of sin is death, but the **gift** of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" (Romans 6)

So turn away from yourself, and to the manger, to the son, who's been given. And hear the angels rejoicing! "*There is rejoicing, in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner who repents.*" (Luke 15) *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior!* And may this prayer, be your prayer. *O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to me I pray. Cast out my sin and enter in, be born in me today. I hear the Christmas angels. their great glad tidings tell. O come to me, abide with me, my Lord, Emmanuel!*

From His first cry in Bethlehem, to His last cry on Calvary, a Son has been given. And He shall be called "Jesus", *for He will save His people from their sins.* (Mt 1:21) Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6) What can we say, but "*Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests.*" (Luke 2:14)

When you go to bed tonight, you might have trouble falling asleep. Like me as a child, you might have one thing on your mind. That's okay. Christmas really *IS* all about the gifts. Or should I say "*THE* gift". God so loved, that He *gave*. He gave His Son, to you, for you. Merry Christmas, indeed!