

Fil-Am Community Church

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Key Verse: Matthew 20:22

### **“THE GIFT OF A SAVIOR”**

Good morning! Christmas is just a few days away and I know everyone is busy shopping and preparing gifts. Have you already thought of a really beautiful gift for your loved ones?

I read about this guy who bought his wife a beautiful diamond ring for Christmas. After hearing about this extravagant gift, a friend of his said, “I thought she wanted one of those sporty four-wheel-drive vehicles.”

“She did,” he replied. “But where was I going to find a fake SUV?”

Now you know what I’m going to give my wife this Christmas. An SUV. You know, the kind that you get at Target. The kind you put down on the floor and pull and let go.

But you know what, my wife actually got a gift like that many years ago. She was not my wife yet. We just started a relationship and, of course, I wanted to make a good impression on her. She was working in upstate New York and she didn’t have a car because she was new in the States. So she carpooled with an officemate everyday. Just before her birthday, I told her I was going to give her a gift. To make a long story short, I put down a down payment for a car and that’s the white Toyota Corolla that we still have around. That was in 2002 and the Corolla, which I drive to Richmond every

week, is still going strong. The lesson: Japanese cars will make a good gift. They last long. And I got married because of it. But what if something went wrong and she broke off our relationship before we got married? Well, the car was under both our names. She wouldn't be able to get rid of me that quickly. I made sure of that. Anyway, I was so sure that she was God's gift to me that I gave her a car instead of a diamond ring.

So, we're continuing our series on the Gifts of Christmas. We talked about God's gifts of strength and joy. This morning, we'll look at the most important gift we'll ever receive. Some are not aware of this gift. And that's why they have pushed away this gift in favor of something temporary, material, and that gratifies the senses. Nothing wrong with receiving gifts but the gift I'm talking about is more valuable than anything you are going to find under your tree.

This morning, I'd like to share with you the Relevance, the Reason, and the Result of this gift.

### **1. THE RELEVANCE: GOD CAME TO EARTH**

The relevance of the Savior is summed up in this one phrase, God came to earth. During WWII it was big news when the allies invaded Normandy on D-Day. But it was bigger news when God invaded earth 2,000 years ago. It was big news when man walked on the moon. But it was bigger news when God walked on the earth. And not only did God come to earth, but most shocking of all He came in the form of a human being.

The Bible says, "*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible*

*and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*” – **Colossians 1:15-17**

Jesus didn't start in the stable. His beginning was not that little manger scene. He existed before creation. In fact, the Bible says that He is the creator because He is God. This God, this creator of the universe, did something that has more relevance to your daily existence than you might have ever considered.

*“(Jesus) ...emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”* – **Philippians 2:7**

If I were God I wouldn't have done it this way. I would have come to earth in a much more spectacular way. I would have added a little more glamour and flash. I would have planned my coming at half time during the Super Bowl. I would have had all the leaders of the world lined up on the 50-yard line waiting to give me billions of dollars' worth of gifts if I was God.

But God knows a lot more about this stuff than I do, and He had another idea. He would come into this world the same way that everybody else in this world came into it, by being born into it. That's shocking, isn't it? That God who created the universe would so humble and limit Himself to come down to earth in human form. And not only that, but to be born of peasant parents in a stable in a little tiny village was unthinkable. All of God's plan for the world was wrapped up in that fragile little infant.

Why did He do it? Of all the ways God could have come to earth why did He come as a baby? Because He came to save us not to scare us, and

nobody's afraid of a baby. God could have come to earth in a lot of ways that would have freaked us all out and scared us to death and made us run in terror. But He didn't do that. He came in a way that we could all relate to because we all had that experience ourselves.

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ was in every sense a human being. When He came to earth He limited Himself so that He could become both God and man at the same time. He was born like us. He grew up like us.

I don't want to blow your stereotype but Jesus didn't walk around in spotless white robes with a halo and a glow on His face. He was every bit a Palestinian Jew, because that's what He was. He looked just like an average guy because He was.

The Bible says that while He was here on earth He was tempted just like we are.

He had the same struggles that I have and you have – the same temptations, the same desires, and the same drives. The Bible says He suffered just like we do. There were times when Jesus was lonely, when He was tempted to be discouraged, when He was frustrated.

That's good news, because it assures us that He understands how we feel. God says, "I've been there. I'm not some distant God who doesn't understand what you're going through. I've been there. I came to earth and experienced what it means to be a human."

Let me tell you a story that was told by the late Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ. He said there was a man from India who was a devout Hindu and who had a profound sense of reverence for life. He would not kill an ant, a cow, or even a cobra, because to him, due to his

belief in reincarnation, he might be killing some past relative.

During his visit to America, he had been confronted with the claims of Christ, yet he could not grasp the biblical truth that God actually visited this planet in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. He could not comprehend how the Great Creator God of the Universe could become a man, or why.

One day as he was walking in the field meditating upon this new truth about Jesus the Christ being God, he was wondering how this could possibly be. He ran across a large ant hill with thousands of little ants scurrying around in their busy like manner. He was standing there observing with wonder the activity of these ants, and what amazing creatures they are, when suddenly, he heard a tremendous and threatening noise. It was the noise of a large tractor plowing the fields.

As he looked up he discovered that the tractor would soon be plowing through that ant hill and thousands of ants would probably be killed and their home destroyed. Grippled with the same concern you and I would feel for hundreds of people trapped in a burning building, he became frantic. He wanted to warn them of their impending destruction.

He thought to himself, "How can I warn them? If I could write in the sand, they wouldn't be able to read it. If I shouted to them, they wouldn't understand me. The only possible way I could communicate with them would be by becoming an ant, if I had that ability."

Then suddenly he had a revelation from the Spirit of God. He saw why God, the Creator of the universe, chose to become one of us by becoming a man, in the Person of the God-man, Jesus of Nazareth.

Through his experience with the ant hill, the light suddenly came on in

the heart of that Hindu man, and now he understood the words of Paul: "Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form" (Philippians 2:6- 7, NLT).

What we and billions of other people will celebrate this week is not the birth of some average, normal baby. This baby was God in human form.

So why is Christmas a big deal? Because of its relevance. God came to earth as a human being and that's what split history into BC and AD – the most significant event in history. But that's not the good news – the good news is why He came and that's the reason for Christmas.

## **2. THE REASON: GOD CAME FOR OUR BENEFIT**

He came because you needed Him to come. You might not even realize it but you needed Him to come. Why did God come to earth at Christmas? The Bible tells us four reasons:

### **A) To Show Us What He Is Like**

There are some things you can learn about God just by going outside into nature. For instance, by looking at nature we can know that God is creative.

By looking at nature we know God is powerful – obviously – the waves, the wind, the rotation of the earth, all the power of God that's seen in the universe.

We know that God is organized because there is order to the universe. We know that God likes variety because there is a lot of variety.

But there are some things, the most important things, you would

never know about God if Jesus hadn't come to tell us. For instance, nature doesn't teach us that God is loving. We only know that because of Jesus Christ. Nature doesn't teach us that God is forgiving. We only know that because of Jesus Christ. Nature doesn't teach us that God has a plan for our life, that we are not an accident, that He put us on earth for a purpose, for a reason. Only Jesus Christ can teach us that. He is the one that lets us know what God is really like.

So, why did God come to earth? To show us what he is like and

### **B) To Show Us How to Live**

*“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” – Matthew 16:25*

Jesus very clearly taught us that true life, true satisfaction, true success, comes not from living for ourselves, but by allowing Christ to live in us and through us. Jesus set the perfect example for us on earth to demonstrate that there is a greater cause to life than self-gratification. We only really live when we die to ourselves and allow God to live through us.

### **C) To Show Us We Can Trust Him**

You do not trust somebody you do not know. The reason why some of us don't trust God more is because we don't know Him. The simple fact is that the more you know God the more you are going to trust Him, the more you are going to know He's worthy of your trust, and that you can count on Him, and depend on Him. Jesus came to show us that He is trustworthy – that we can place our lives in His hands, and that we can rely on the promises that He has given us.

### **D) To Show Us How to Be Forgiveness**

God came to earth in the form of Jesus to forgive everything you have ever done wrong so you can go to a perfect place called heaven when you die.

*“You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.” – 1 John 3:5*

Jesus Christ came to earth to die for all the things that you’ve done wrong, so you don’t have to pay for them, so you can be forgiven, so you can go scot-free. That’s called grace and it’s the only way you’re ever going to get into heaven because none of us is perfect – What a deal! It cost Jesus Christ a lot – He left His eternal throne, His home in glory. He limited Himself and became a human being; He put up with all the aches and pains and suffering even though He is God; He gave His life for us, He died on the cross.

Jesus Christ didn’t stay in the crib, He went to the cross. Now why in the world would He do that? Why in the world would God come to earth in human form and die for you? I’ll tell you why – Because He loves you. He loves you more than you will ever understand or comprehend.

*“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”*

### **1 John 4:9-10**

I know you’ve heard the phrase, “Jesus is the reason for the season.” And that is true – Jesus is the reason for the season. Christmas is not about a Santa – it’s about a Savior. It’s not about jingle bells – it’s about Jesus – and that’s why we celebrate this.

But let me teach you a deeper truth than that. You are the reason for the season. If God hadn't known that you needed Him to come to earth and die for you He wouldn't have done it.

If you didn't need what Jesus Christ had to offer He wouldn't have wasted the effort. You are the reason for the season – You are the reason we celebrate Christmas. It's God's Christmas gift to you.

### **3. THE RESULT: YOU CAN KNOW GOD IN RELATIONSHIP**

You can have a personal relationship with the Creator of the universe. God knows everything about you and He wants you to know about Him. God wants you to be His friend and He wants to be your friend. In fact, the reason you were created is so you could have a relationship with God. If you miss that you've just blown your whole life – this is the greatest gift of Christmas.

God says, "I want you to know Me like I know you." But you have to receive the gift if it's going to make any difference in your life. God has a wonderful gift for you:

*"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."* – **Romans 5:10-11**

This is the most wonderful gift you will ever be given – nothing else even compares to it. On Christmas Day you're probably going to open up a bunch of gifts. Some of those gifts are going to be impersonal, some impractical, some temporary – some of them are going to be flat out cheap. None of those adjectives apply to God's gift to you.

You see, **this Gift is Personal** – It is custom made to you. “Unto you is born a Savior,” the angel said – It is personal. **This Gift is Practical** – This is the most practical gift you’ll ever get. It’s useful. You need this gift now and forever.

**This Gift is Priceless** – You cannot put a price on what this gift did for you.

**This Gift is Permanent** – It will last forever throughout eternity.

Where are you going to get a gift like that? Nowhere, except from God. If I told you that I have a gift for you and that gift will solve all your biggest problems, heal all your deepest hurts, forgive every single mistake you’ve ever made, help you understand the purpose you were put on earth for, make you a better person, fill your life with confidence and joy and peace and secure your future in heaven would you be interested in a gift like that? I guess so!

Lee, a reporter for the Chicago Tribune and a self-professed atheist was sitting at his desk on Christmas Eve. A slow news day he found himself reminiscing about the Delgado family that he had featured while writing a series of articles about Chicago’s neediest people a few days earlier. The Delgado’s were comprised of a grandmother named Perfecta and her two granddaughters, Jenny age 13 and her sister Lydia 11 years old.

He remembered how unprepared he was when he walked into their two room apartment on the west side of Chicago for the interview; bare halls and bare walls, no furniture, no rugs, nothing but a kitchen table and a handful of rice in the cupboards. He learned during the interview that Jenny and Lydia only had one short-sleeved dress apiece, plus a thin gray sweater

that they shared. On cold days when the girls walked the half-mile to school, one of the girls would start with the sweater and then give it to the other at the halfway mark. It was all they had. Perfecta wanted more for her granddaughters and would gladly have worked, but her severe arthritis and age made work too difficult and painful.

Since it was a slow news day Lee decided to drive to Chicago's west side to check up on the Delgado's. When Jenny opened the door he couldn't believe what he saw!

His article on the Delgado's had touched the hearts of many subscribers who responded with furniture and appliances, rugs, dozens of coats, scarves and gloves. The girls wouldn't have to share a sweater any longer.

There were cartons and cartons and boxes of food everywhere. They had so much food that the cupboards and closets couldn't contain it. Someone had even donated a Christmas tree, and under it were mounds of presents and thousands of dollars in cash!

Lee was astonished! But what astonished him the most was what he found Perfecta and her granddaughters doing. They were preparing to give most of it away. "Why would you give so much of this away?" Lee asked. Perfecta responded, "Our neighbors are still in need. We cannot have plenty while they have nothing. This is what Jesus would want us to do." Lee was dumbfounded.

After regaining his composure he asked Perfecta another question. He wanted to know what she and the girls thought about the generosity that was shown to them. Again, Lee was not prepared for the answer. She said,

"This is wonderful, this is very good. We did nothing to deserve this; it's all a gift from God. But," she added, "It is not his greatest gift, Lee. No, we celebrate that tomorrow. Jesus."

Lee was speechless as he drove back to the office. In the quiet of his car he noted a couple of observations. He had plenty and along with it plenty of anxiety, while the Delgado's despite their poverty had peace. Lee had everything and yet wanted more, but the Delgado's had nothing and yet knew generosity. Lee had everything and yet his life was as bare as the Delgado's apartment prior to the article he wrote. And yet the Delgado's who had nothing were filled with hope, contentment and had a spiritual certainty. Even though Lee had so much more than the Delgado's, he longed for what they had in their poverty.

Lee, btw, is Lee Strobel, the atheist who became a Christian and who wrote the popular books, *The Case for Christ*, *The Case for Easter*, *The Case for Faith*, and *The Case for Christmas*.

So let me ask you a very personal question: How many more Christmases are you going to go through before you finally accept God's gift to you? You celebrate this event year after year after year without unwrapping the biggest gift under the tree – God's gift to you – the gift of a Savior. How many more? An unopened wonderful gift is a worthless gift. Today, now, this time, don't let another Christmas go by without accepting and unwrapping God's gift to you.

The Bible says that one day everybody that has ever lived is going to stand before God on a day of accountability, and the Bible says that every

knee will bow and openly admit what's been the truth for all eternity – Jesus is Lord.

*“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” – **Philippians 2:9-11***

It will be too late for some people – but they're going to admit it eventually. Every politician is going to be there – Every businessman – Every rock star – Every athlete – Every homemaker – all will be there on their knees saying *Jesus is Lord*. We're all going to admit it one day. All the denial will be over; all the arrogance will be over.

The issue is not whether you're ever going to admit that Jesus is Lord – You're going to. The issue is not *if* – It's just a matter of *when* – Either now or later. Why would you wait? Why not say, this Christmas, I want Jesus Christ to be the Lord of my life?