



# *The Wonderful*

# *Gifts of Christmas*

Message for 7 pm Christmas Carol Service on Friday, 24<sup>th</sup> December 2021

## *God's Greatest Christmas Gift*

Well, how many of you are looking forward to opening a really great present this Christmas?

In my family, we guarantee Christmas gift successes. How? We each let the other know what our personal preferences are.

So, nothing is worse than hearing, 'Oh, I don't know. You decide!

So, how do you decide what is a great gift?

To one it might be a new pair of socks, to another a new iPhone! It really depends upon the person, their wants and needs.

What makes a great gift?

Well, I would suggest, great gifts have two qualities:

- It must be something the person cannot possibly afford, nor do they actually deserve; and
- It must be something they desperately cannot live without.

Have you received a great gift like that?

A gift - that when you opened it you exclaimed, "Oh Wow, that's exactly what I need!" or "That's exactly what I wanted!"

Because it is this kind of gift, God gave to each and every one of us at Christmas.

**Point 1 | God's Greatest Christmas gift is one we could never afford nor do we deserve**

About two weeks ago I learnt a new word – 'zeitgeist'.



What, on earth is 'zeitgeist'? It is a term that identifies the defining spirit or mood of a particular period of history as shown by the ideas and beliefs of the time. It is also called 'the spirit of the age', an invisible agent or force dominating the characteristics of a given epoch of time.

With almost every person in the world today owning a phone, and most using their phone to search on their everyday concerns and questions, it is not difficult for Google to identify what the top Zeitgeist trends of our times are.

It is not surprising, the most popular topic on everyone's lips in 2020 was the Coronavirus.

Now, however, the dominant question is "how will the pandemic end?"

To find the answer, you're invited to listen to the top 'Zeitgeists' of the day – people who study culture, its themes, patterns, and predictions.

One of Google's most respected Zeitgeists is a man named Malcolm Gladwell. You can imagine, how amused to learn his suggestion, "Why we need to treat the pandemic like soccer." What is he on about?

Well, any savvy soccer coach knows, that the way to improve a team's scores, is not by putting all his energy into the team's star players. Rather, the coach invests his time and energy in training the weakest players, so they improve – then, the whole team benefits and they win more games!

So, Malcolm suggests, the way out of the pandemic is to concentrate on identifying society's weakest and most vulnerable and investing capital in making them stronger and more resilient.

So, what is society's weakest link? What is causing the greatest problems in the world today? Is poor health care? world poverty? Corrupt governments? mental illness? Racism?

For thousands of years the greatest minds throughout the world, have been unable to decide on the answer.

Perhaps it's time to consult the Creator.

God has told us what state the world was in just before he gave his greatest gift.

As he looked over his entire creation, he identified our biggest problem.

He declared *"No one is righteous—not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away; all have become corrupt. No one does good, not a single one."* (Psalm 14:1-3, 53:1-3 and Romans 3:10-12)

Humanity's greatest weakness was our dogged determination to ignore him and live our lives our own way. That, in reality, is the weakness that is in all of us.

Our determination to be our own gods, only threw the world into greater darkness and chaos.

And so, when God could not wait any longer, about two thousand years ago, on a quiet night, when the darkness that pervaded the world had grown to a seemingly impenetrable layer – a bright light suddenly broke into the sky.

An unmistakable star appeared in the heavens – a divine sign that humanity’s cry was about to be answered.

God had decided, it was time for humanity to receive the gift they so desperately needed, the gift they could never afford, nor did they deserve.

## **Point 2 | God’s Greatest Christmas gift is one we desperately can’t live without**

But, wait a minute. We need to talk about ‘gifts’ for a bit.

Too often when we hear the word ‘gifts’ we think of the new pair of socks, or cork coasters our distant relative mailed to us – you know the gift we open with fanned thanks, while inwardly groaning, because we will never use it. Its destination is one place - the Op shop.

Or, the word ‘gifts’ makes us think of something that is nice and pretty, an item which makes our life easier, and or more pleasurable. A new handbag to join the 10 others hanging in our cupboard. Or, a new power tool, to hang on the wall in the shed.

But, when God speaks of gifts – they are not like that.

When God speaks of gifts, they are always absolutely essential.

None of the gifts God offers to humanity are optional extras. Nor, in fact, are any of His gifts able to be put on the shelf to be admired or allowed to collect dust.

God **only** gives gifts that humanity literally can’t live without.

Here before me, I have five gifts – each one represents just some of the gifts God gave to us at Christmas.

Yes, they were offered two thousand years ago, and the world demand for them is still so high - they are still on special today!

Am I beginning to sound like a commercial? Well, that’s because, in the weeks before God was about to give His priceless Christmas gifts, He launched a divine promotional campaign, announcing to everyone that His gift was on its way.

The first gift was given nine months before the launch date. It was the gift of **Hope**. On the advent calendar the first candle is called the Prophecy Candle for it reminds us that God spoke time and time again through the prophets foretelling his Awaited Gift was going to come.

What is the fruit of prophecy? Prophecy births hope. And hope is the joyful anticipation of goodness, which creates an expectancy for the fulfilment of the promises of God.

We know that our God is “the God of Hope”. His gift of hope is designed to “fill us with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of God’s Spirit we will abound in hope and overflow with confidence in His promises” (Rom 15:13).

This is why Mary was able to believe the words of God’s messenger (see Luke 1:38). She was given the gift of hope, which enabled her to grow a joyful expectation that what God had promised would certainly come to pass.

God knows, it is impossible to live in this world without hope – so, he offered the gift of hope that the Saviour of the world was coming.

The second gift was given as Mary and Joseph embarked on the long and arduous journey toward Bethlehem. It is the gift of **Faith**. Faith is having “confident expectation of things hoped for, the evidence of things we cannot see.” (Hebrews 11:1)

God knows, it is impossible to live in this world without faith. Despite what many think, everyone puts their faith into something. Those who accept God’s gift of faith, use it to trust in a God they cannot see.

The third gift involved God really ramping up his advertising campaign. It was given within hours of the final launch. A bunch of shepherds just happened to be staring at the sky, received the gift of **Joy**. When they saw an angel, and heard:

*“I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Saviour – yes, the Messiah, the Lord – has been born today in Bethlehem the city of David”*(Luke 2:10)

God knows, we cannot live without joy. But joy comes through receiving and opening the first two gifts. For, Joy is like the flowers that blossom on the branches of the tree of faith, that springs up in a heart of nutritious soil where the seed of hope is growing.

And there is a fourth gift. It is the gift of **Peace**. One angel was not enough to announce the coming of the greatest gift – a great army of angels appeared in the sky and declared, *“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”* (Luke 1:14)

If ever there was a gift that is needed in the world today – it is God’s gift of peace.

But God was not talking about the experience of well-being, calmness and serenity.

No! When God offered the gift of peace – it was a declaration that finally humanity could be saved from its weakest link – saved from living under the heavy cloud of darkness which ruled the world.

But wait, there is more! God’s final and greatest gift – is yet to be opened.

### **Point 3 | God’s Christmas gift is often left unopened – especially if we fail to recognise how desperately we need what God is offering us**

Have you ever left a Christmas gift unopened? I haven’t.

But many of us have probably received a gift card, only to put it in our wallet, and years later discover its expired!

Sadly, when it comes to God’s greatest Christmas gift, that is what many do. They have left the greatest of all gifts – the gift of God’s love wrapped up in His Son, Jesus Christ - unopened.

It reminds me of a young man who was expecting to get a car for Christmas from his wealthy grandfather. On the appointed day, the grandfather handed the teenager a box. The boy tore open the box to find a leather Bible inside. His grandfather asked, “Do you like it?”

The boy politely answered that he did, but his face showed his disappointment. The grandfather told him to be sure to read the Christmas story when he got a chance. The boy promised he would. However, he went home and tossed the Bible inside a drawer and never opened it.

A few months later, the grandfather died. At the funeral, the cousin of the young man asked, how he liked his new car. The boy replied that he had not received a car for Christmas. 'Grandfather only given me an old Bible.' The cousin said, "Go home and read Luke chapter 2 and see what you find."

Later that day, the boy opened the drawer, pulled out the Bible and turned to Luke. There he found a letter from his grandfather tucked in the pages of the Christmas story. He opened it and discovered a key to a brand-new car.

But when he read the tag attached to the key, he broke down. It said, "Your new car is being held at the dealer for 90 days. You must pick it up by then or you will lose it." The boy quickly looked at a calendar. He threw his hands over his face because he had missed the deadline by just 3 days.

He had left a great gift unopened for too long.

Many people do the same thing with God's greatest gift, His Son Jesus.

For although they fully intend to look into this Jesus character one day in the future, they get distracted, life slips away, and the gift is left unopened.

**Application |** Don't leave God's greatest Christmas gift under the tree this year.

Open your heart to Jesus this Christmas and unwrap God's greatest of all Christmas gifts – the gift of His love and the gift of eternal life! This is the one gift you don't want to leave unopened!!!