

# **Bible Studies for Life Series for December 31: Good news—the gospel is for everyone**

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### **Good news—the gospel is for everyone**

- Luke 2:25-38

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Gifts, both the giving and receiving of them, have been much on the mind lately. Over the last several weeks, as we have prepared for and experienced Christmas, chances are that more than enough time has been spent thinking about gifts. By this time, some gifts have been given, received and some perhaps even returned or exchanged. Our hope is that friends and family members keep, cherish and put to good use each carefully chosen gift.

Over the last several weeks, we have reflected about “Life-Changing Gifts from God: Faith, hope, love and the gift of God’s son Jesus.” Our response to these gifts allows them to become life-transforming realities in our lives. The hope, as with all gifts, is that we would keep, cherish and put to good use these gifts from God and recognize God’s gift of salvation through Jesus

Christ.



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Following the description of Jesus' birth, the story takes a dramatic outward turn. To this point in the narrative, the story has been an account of essentially a family affair. With few exceptions, the action and dialogue focus on the lives of just a few people: Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph.

However, after Jesus' birth an angel of the Lord announces the event to shepherds. This justifiably famous account sits deep in the hearts and minds of most Christians, and though the focal passage for the lesson urges us forward, Luke bids us to tarry at the manger just a bit longer.

My first encounter with these powerful words came when I, as a young boy, first viewed, "A Charlie Brown Christmas." In response to Charlie Brown's heartfelt request for someone to tell him the meaning of Christmas, a sympathetic Linus steps to center stage and recites Luke 2:8-14. At the end of his soliloquy, Linus says simply, "That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown."

The rhythm and tone of Linus' voice still fills my head each time I read or hear these words: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men (Luke 2:14). Linus' words to Charlie Brown—the angel's word to shepherds long ago—the announcement of God's intention coming to bear in the world are "what Christmas is all about."

That the announcement comes first to lowly shepherds demonstrates an important facet of Luke's perspective on the gospel story. The focal passage (Luke 2:25-38) comes from Luke's account of the days and weeks following the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem and presents two important minor characters who recognize and give thanks for what God has done in Jesus. However, the first outward turn of the gospel comes toward shepherds, outcasts, those on the fringe of society.

For Luke, there is perhaps no more important theme—the gospel is for everyone! This is not a minor or momentary aside for Luke. Luke's good news story emphasizes the important role of women, minorities and the poor.

Even the righteous and devout Simeon recognizes the universal scope of what God is doing in Jesus. When he is present with the child in the temple, Simeon declares: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (vv. 29-31).

The ever-widening circles of God's grace begin with the announcement of God's good news to shepherds, and God's devout servant recognizes the result is the possibility of salvation for the whole world.

Because Simeon remains attuned to God's presence and leading in his life, God's decisive action in the world does not escape his notice. Moved by the Holy Spirit, Simeon goes to where he expects to see God in action (v. 27). Once at the Temple courts, Simeon recognizes the baby Jesus as God's salvation for Jews and Gentiles.

Beyond the recognition of God's salvation, Simeon understands the significance of this moment in history. Simeon sees that for himself, for Israel and for the world, things will never be the same. "Now," Simeon

says, “dismiss your servant in peace” (v. 29). Simeon’s life, which has been faithfully moving towards this point, now changes forever.

Israel, too, faces the possibility of “falling” or “rising” based on its response to what God has done in Jesus (vv. 34-35). The whole world faces its destiny in how it responds to what God has done in Jesus.

C.S. Lewis famously expressed in *Mere Christianity* about Jesus: “You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God.” God has acted decisively in Jesus, and no one can know him and be unchanged.

The focal passage concludes with a brief account of the prophet Anna who also greets Mary, Joseph and Jesus in the temple. At the outset of this text, Luke tells us Simeon was “waiting for the consolation of Israel” (v. 25). At this turning of the narrative, we meet Anna who gives thanks to God and speaks about the child “to all who were looking for the redemption of Israel” (v. 38).

Luke’s bracketing of these stories with these similar phrases suggests these faithful and devout individuals understood Israel finds consolation in what God has done in Jesus—that Judah experiences redemption through what God has done in Jesus. Anna gives thanks because God is faithful to his plan to bless the whole world through her people.

Let it be also our reason for celebration and gratitude—that we who have received the gift of salvation might give thanks for our continuing opportunity to bring God’s gift of salvation to all people.

### **Discussion questions**

- How do we continue to allow the gospel story to make those important “outward turns” toward those on the fringe of society?
- How and where do we continue to recognize God’s decisive working in the world?
- What are appropriate ways to celebrate and give thanks for God’s salvation offered to the whole world?

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