

Bible Studies for Life for December 21: The message of missions

December 8, 2008

Merry Christmas! This week is sure to be filled with the hustle and bustle of holiday preparations. You know: decorations, shopping, baking, parties, caroling, candlelight services and family get-togethers. It's enough to make us forget what Christmas is all about.

Today we read the Christmas story, the story of how God in heaven gave his creation on earth the greatest gift ever given. And this is what all the bustle is about.

Jesus is the gift

I don't know about you, but I give gifts at Christmas because it's fun, not as a memorial to Jesus' birth. And if we're honest, I believe that's true for all of us. We love to see our children's faces light up when they tear off the paper and find the one gift they'd been hoping for. We love the surprise when we tear off the paper of our own gifts. We love the excitement, the anticipation and the eventual discovery.

But if we'll slow down enough to think about it, we'll realize Father God loves giving gifts, too. He also must love seeing his children's faces when they realize the magnitude of the gift of salvation. After all, God offers salvation as a gift, for the express purpose of blessing us and giving us joy—"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Jesus is the light

We call Jesus the Light of the world, and God announced his birth with light:

- The angels, when they told the shepherds about Jesus' birth, shone with the glory of the Lord (Luke 2:9).
- God placed a new star over Bethlehem as a birth announcement to people everywhere. As you know, it was the star that drew the magi from the east. "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him" (Matthew 2:2).
- Zechariah, prophesying over newborn John the Baptist, revealed God's purpose for sending Jesus into the world: "Because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace" (Luke 1:78-79).

Without the gift of salvation, we are lost in darkness, hopeless and condemned. Jesus is the light that shows us the way back to God, to forgiveness and peace.

Jesus is the message

God communicated in as many ways as he could Jesus is the message:

- When the angel told Mary she would bear the long-awaited Messiah, he told her to name the child Jesus. Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua, and it means "the Lord saves."
- When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he told his followers, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).
- The disciple John calls Jesus the Word in John 1:14. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

When Jesus was born, he brought the message of hope with him: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). But not only that, he is the message of hope—“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

People need to hear ... so they can receive their gift as well

Like Simeon, who was anxious to see the Christ child before he died, seekers everywhere are looking for the Truth. They know it’s out there somewhere, if only they can find it. The story of Jesus is the gift of peace they are looking for.

But even in biblical times, when they didn’t fully understand the gift of salvation, people rejoiced when they heard about Jesus.

- The shepherds glorified and praised God after seeing Jesus: “When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them” (Luke 2:17-20).
- Simeon praised God, calling Jesus “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:32).

As Christians, we have received the greatest gift ever given, God’s gift of salvation for all mankind. Do we really understand its value? The gift of salvation was meant to be shared. Yet now, at the time of year we celebrate the Christ-mass, we allow busyness to keep us from remembering the reason for the celebration.

We forget there are people out there who don’t have the gift. The gifts they’ll open this Christmas are pale imitations of the real thing. Let’s take a moment to pray for opportunities to share the story of Jesus, the reason for the season, and the best gift anyone could receive.

Discussion questions

- *Do you remember how you felt before learning about salvation? Describe your feelings.*
- *How did you feel after becoming saved?*
- *Why do we hesitate to share the gift of salvation with others? Is this fair or right?*