

A SAVIOR IS BORN

Part 4: Don't Miss Christmas
Luke 2:1-20; Matthew 2:1-12
and

Special Christmas Eve Service
The Christmas Gift of Peace

Written by Pastor Steve Norman
December 21-27, 2020

Words of Encouragement Days 127-133



Hope is a powerful force in the human heart. In fact, **Hope** is **THE** essential ingredient for an abundant life, the kind of life that Jesus promised us. It's essential. We need **HOPE** and the good news is **THERE IS HOPE!**

The first Christmas gift brought the greatest **HOPE** of all — a Savior - to people who needed it most. Everyone could use more **HOPE** - You, me, family, neighbors, friends, those you know slightly and those you haven't even met yet. Need some **HOPE** this Christmas? Do you want to know how to share a word of **HOPE** with those around you? Join us online each Sunday to discover how to open God's gift of **HOPE** this Christmas.

This Week's Memory Verse:

Isaiah 45:22

**"Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth;
for I am God, and there is no other."**

Isaiah 9:6

**"A child has been born for us and God has given us a
Son . . . He will be called . . . the Prince of PEACE!"**

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 127

“But now, O Jacob, listen to the Lord who created you. O Israel, the one who formed you says, “Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine.” Isaiah 43:1

NO LONGER A SLAVE TO FEAR

AS a parent, we tend to worry. A lot. But after twenty-three years on the job, most of my worries pale in comparison to when I was a brand-new dad with my newly-minted firstborn. I was constantly on edge. Was she hungry? Were the bottles sterilized? Did she need a diaper change? Was she breathing?

Now imagine for a moment being in Mary’s shoes (or, more likely, dusty, worn-out sandals). A barn for a delivery room, a trough for a crib, an inexperienced young husband for a midwife – and the Savior of the World for a son. Talk about a perfect recipe for concocting fear!

Ironically, this baby didn’t bring on fears typical of a first-time momma. He brought deep, unshakable joy and peace to Mary – and brings the same to us today. He brings us into a relationship with the Father. He replaces fear with faith. Sometimes, the journey getting there is painful, but when you’re not bound by fear – fear of failure, fear of people and of circumstances, fear of rejection, fear of judgment, fear of you-name-it – you become who you were created to be.

I’m no longer a slave to fear. I am a child of God.

TODAY’S PRAYER

Heavenly Father, Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh, what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to You in prayer. Yes, Lord, I bring my fears before You. Some of them are well worn, like a comfy old pair of shoes. Before I even take a step in the morning, they are there, ready to be worn. Others are brand new, creeping in when I least expect it. Some come upon me quickly, others dawn on me slowly. Some follow me during the day, and some keep me up at night, but each one is a fear I don't need to carry. Take those fears, all of those fears, and replace them with your forever joy. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 128

"After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." Isaiah 53:11-12

HOW I MET JESUS AT THE MALL

DOES this sound familiar? On a normal, not Covid-inspired year, it was less than two weeks before Christmas, and I was where I am usually at that time of year – *nowhere* on my mile-long to-do list. With gifts on my list still to be purchased, I did what every brave and slightly deranged person does – ventured to a mall packed with the hustle of Saturday evening shoppers. I braced myself for the Battle of Elbow Room. I entered the fray of frenzy – this was going to make the Roman Colosseum look like a children’s playground, but as I stepped out of the elevator into the “arena”, I was dumbstruck. Standing tall in the throng of humanity was Rio de Janeiro’s famous Christ the Redeemer statue. It was much smaller than the almost-100-foot-tall original, but it was still pretty impressive. Here was Jesus with His arms stretched out over the chaos of shoppers. I expected a few gold bells and red ribbons gracing the mall. But Christ the Redeemer? Does that even fit the Christmas story?

Yes, at Christmas we celebrate the Christ child, but that’s only a part of the story — a very small part. If our focus is entirely on Christ’s birth, we miss the purpose for which he came. Jesus doesn’t just want our adoration, he yearns for our salvation. He came to **redeem** us from our empty way of life. **Without the whole story of Christmas, we miss out on the whole joy.** Christmas is the love story of a God

who broke into the darkness of this world. It’s the story of a God who would humble Himself and give up His majesty for a manger, but it didn’t end there. **It’s the scandalous story of a God who chose to die for us. It’s the victorious story of a God who rose again and completely destroyed sin and death.**

TODAY’S PRAYER

Lord, Your story is much bigger than one night in Bethlehem. It is much longer than that night You were born as a baby, God come to earth. It spans thousands of years and continued long after that night the angels proclaimed to the shepherds, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." (Luke 2:14). This Christmas, help me stop and ponder all that You accomplished. You not only came to earth to live among us, but You poured out Your life as an offering. You lived to die so we could be with You forever. Thank You for Your love that I can never fully grasp. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 129

“After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.” Matthew 2:9-11

WISE MEN STILL SEEK JESUS

IT wasn't till a few years ago that I discovered there may have been more than three wise men in the Christmas narrative. Whhaat? And they weren't necessarily kings?! And they didn't get to Bethlehem in a day or two to see baby Jesus?! In fact, quite possibly it may have taken months! Audible gasp!

This was as surprising as the “apple” that Adam and Eve ate – which turned out not to be an apple at all. It was just a nameless fruit that morphed into an apple in Sunday School. Like the “three” kings who followed the star that, too, was a little bit of an assumption, but that's not the point. If I focus on numbers, the syntax, or the classification of fruit and vegetables, I miss out on the fact that the wise men saw the star. The star was in the sky for many to see and for many to follow. But in that dark sky, only a small group of them (three, four, it's really anyone's guess) beheld the star and left everything behind to follow Jesus.

The question posed in the Christmas story is the same one still being asked today. This Christmas season, are we willing to look at the dark sky of the world around us to see the Light of the World? Are we willing to give up everything else, like the wise men did, and follow the Light?

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, I thank you that even in the darkest of nights, You sent Jesus to be our Light. It's so easy to focus on the darkness that surrounds us. It's easy to give in to discouragement and let disappointment feed my soul. Help me open my eyes to see *the* Light, Your Light, and give me a heart to follow hard after You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 130

“So don’t be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession.” James 1:16-18

OUR INCOGNITO GOD

I don’t know about you, but I have been to many a party where I would like to hide behind a curtain or melt into the sofa. Everyone seems to know everyone. The place is buzzing with conversation and laughter. The louder it gets, the more I would like to vamoose. It seems like some people make an entrance and love the spotlight at parties. Others, not so much.

As it turns out, if you are in the latter camp, you are in *pretty* good company. Jesus slipped into the world quietly. Scripture records that when the times had reached their fulfillment, God became man. There were no trumpet calls, there were no grand announcements (except to a bedraggled group of sleepy shepherds), there were no clicking cameras, and no red carpet. Just a quiet manger. Just Mary, Joseph, and a few farm animals, the only witnesses to a world-changing event.

Even today it’s easy to miss God in the moments that pass us by. We tend to count blessings as sheer luck or coincidence. We think we have earned our way through hard work or our talent, when, in fact, it is God alone who gives us special moments of his design called blessings. God is a gentleman who doesn’t force His way into our lives. He longs for us to acknowledge Him, but He never barges in. Instead He keeps knocking on the door of our heart until we open it. He waits for us to realize and

acknowledge the truth - that our very purpose on earth is to reflect His grace and glorify His name. Have you taken time lately to thank Him for His blessings and give Him the praise He deserves?

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank You for revealing to me that every good and perfect gift is from You. From the fullness of Your grace I have received one blessing after another. Father, let my first instinct be to praise You. Help me to daily acknowledge that You are the very Author of life and my gracious Provider. Thank you for coming down from heaven to save me and extending to me every blessing I experience from Your hand. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 131

"That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger." Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased." When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished,"
Luke 2:8-18

THE FIRST EVANGELISTS

GRAND announcements are made via media outlets every single day. "Breaking News!" "You heard it from us first!" "We are there when it happens!" Those are just some of the claims of newspapers and TV channels.

However, the biggest announcement of all time came first to a group of unassuming folks in a village more than 2000 years ago. The group of shepherds that we read about in Luke 2 became privy to the grandest declaration of all – that God became man and was now among them. These guys, who were just minding their own business tending to their flock of sheep, were witnesses to a marvelous concert of what one 7-year-old called a "multiplication of

angels." They were the audience for the grandest ever light-and-sound show in history.

Just like a good plot in a great novel, the story didn't end there. They ran to where the Christ child lay, and when they found him, they worshiped. Then, in sheer excitement, they shared the marvelous news with others. The very first evangelists weren't glitzy or glamorous. They didn't have the right packaging. They weren't trained orators. They didn't even take time to rehearse what they would say. What they did have, however, was the right heart and that was something God could use!

God honors the humble. He doesn't wait for the world's accolades before He chooses someone. He only wants a humble heart willing to be used by Him.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for coming to earth in the humblest of circumstances so long ago. When you came, You turned the world's standards upside down. You came to save all people - simple and great alike. Man looks at the outside, but You do not differentiate based upon what is seen. You are not concerned with power and position. Status does not impress You. You are concerned with the inside and You examine a person's heart. Today, Lord, I come humbly before you to thank you for accepting me just as I am and to offer myself as a living sacrifice for Your glory. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 132

"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

HOW MANY KINGS?

SEVERAL years ago, a new song titled "How Many Kings?" was released. The words to the chorus are:

*How many kings step down from their thrones?
How many lords have abandoned their homes?
How many greats have become the least for me?
And how many gods have poured out their hearts
To romance a world that is torn all apart?
How many fathers gave up their sons for me?
Only one did that for me.*

Whenever I listen to that song on my phone, one line hits home harder than all of the other lines: **How many fathers gave up their sons for me?** As a dad, I cannot imagine ever giving up my kids. No matter how noble a cause may be, for me, that seems to me to be an impossible commission.

Our Father God, however, did not flinch when it came to doing that to carry out His will, His rescue plan. He knew the entire world, past, present, and future, was writhing in pain, and He knew that sending His Son was the only way out.

For God so loved the world. No one else is capable of that love. Only God.

That He gave His one and only Son. No one else is capable of that sacrifice. Only God.

That's Christmas.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, So often in the midst of the nativity story, I forget the truth that is looking right back at me. You sent *Your Son*. You, Heavenly Father, gave up Your one and only Son for us – for me. What an indescribable gift. What an indescribable sacrifice. I stand in awe of it and of You. Thank you! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 133

“Jesus replied, “Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.” John 4:13-14

EMPTY BOXES

A missionary shared years ago, “Growing up in India, I remember Christmas as a child. My sister and I ended up with a grand total of one gift each. Or less. Surprisingly enough, not even for a moment did we consider it a human rights violation! Because Christmas was so much more than gifts. It was about carol singing and platefuls of *biryani*, homemade plum cake heavy with dried fruit and 'Christmas trees' made of green tinsel and decorated with balloons and cotton wool 'snow.’”

“As part of our Christmas decorating, I remember covering empty cardboard cartons with gift wrapping paper to place under the tree. Empty cardboard cartons. I had seen Christmas trees choked with presents in Hollywood movies. But, in my mind, those were props. All of them couldn't possibly be real presents. No, we weren't poor or miserly. Having a bunch of gifts under the tree just didn't map on our radar.”

Maybe, just maybe, those empty boxes are significant. So often, our lives are too full of stuff, too choked with activity, too “satisfied” with the temporary, or too preoccupied with the gifts, that we forget the Giver. It's only when we offer up our empty boxes that He has a chance to fill them. He is ready to give us an identity as His child, a significance

that we are known and loved by Him, and a purpose that we are created for His glory and for the good works that He has prepared. But first we have to give Him the chance.

I've seen my children's eyes light up with the thrill of Christmas gifts. But after the wrapping paper wreckage has been cleared, and the gloss of new gifts has faded, they are often want for more in a few weeks. What a picture of us grownups! This Christmas, instead of placing such weight on gifts that will fade away, let us recognize that we can never be deeply and fully satisfied apart from Christ. Sure, gifts are great and the joy of giving greater, but let's not cling to our gifts so much that we forget the Giver.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, You are the Giver of good gifts. Help me to come with open arms to receive what can only be found in you, to drink from the streams of Living Water, and eat of the Bread of Life. As I enjoy the gifts you send, help me to let go of the temporary fixes and the gifts that delight for a day, and let me look beyond them to see You, the Giver of all good things. Show me how to delight in being in your presence and truly live the abundant life you came to give me. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve