TITLE: Greatest gift of all (the Joy of Christmas)

TEXT: Is. 7:14; Lk. 1:26-35 & 2:8-14; Is. 9:6-7; Lk. 9:25

INTRODUCTION: One of the wonderful parts of Christmas is the giving and receiving of gifts. It is the part of Christmas that puts anticipation and Joy in the hearts of not just children but most adults as well.

 The very first Christmas was just the same. It was centered on the anticipation and joy of receiving a gift. It was a gift that had been promised and anxiously awaited for hundreds of years.

 About 760 years before the birth of Christ the prophet Isaiah foretold of a coming day that brought much anticipation and joy to the hearers of his day.

**Isaiah 7:14 (NIV)** **14Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.**

What a message of hope and joy that would create a sense of anticipation in the heart of those who heard and believed it.

**The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel!**

 I don’t know about you but if I lived back then and I was told by a known prophet of God that at a future time God would send a messiah, a savior to deliver and save us from our sin and that the sign of His coming would be **The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel,** I would get excited about that! That is something that would have given me a great sense of anticipation and hopeful joy..

The virgin will be with child!

This isn’t saying that a virgin will become pregnant but that a virgin will be pregnant…Something totally and completely impossible from human perspective. A virgin conceiving a child while retaining her virginity.

 And then to hear what this child would be called once he was born-- Immanuel! God with us or with us is God!

What the prophet was proclaiming was that God would incarnate Himself into the human race through a woman who had never known a man, a virgin.

There may have been some skeptics in Isaiah’s day when he gave this prophecy but 760 years later this message was repeated by an angelic messenger of God to a lowly young Jewish girl named Mary…..

 **Luke 1:26 – 35 (NIV)** **26In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,** **27to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.** **28The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”** **29Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.** **30But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.** **31You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.** **32He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,** **33and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.” 34“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”**

**35The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.**

Approximately 9 months later all that has been prophesied enters the realm of reality…

**Luke 2:8 - 14 (NIV)** **8And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.** **9An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.** **10But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.** **11Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.** **12This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”** **13Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”**

The angel proclaimed…. **I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.**

Imagine yourself in those shepherds’ sandals that night?

 You’re minding your own business, tending to your normal evening duties as a shepherd of the sheep, when an angel shows up and the Glory of God shines all around you. You not only behold such a magnificent sight but you also hear the angel proclaim: **I bring you good tidings of great joy!**

This angel was actually the first preacher of the Gospel!

The word Gospel literally means glad tidings, good news, wonderful news.

**I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.  11Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.**

I wonder if other words of the prophet Isaiah came to the minds of those shepherds that night who heard this proclamation from the angel**…**

 **Isaiah 9:6 - 7 (NIV)** **6For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,  and the government will be on his shoulders.  And he will be called Wonderful Counselor Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.** **7Of the increase of his government and peace  there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom,     establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.     The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.**

Of all the gifts that have ever been given, this is the greatest gift of all gifts, and it comes from God Himself!

The gift of Jesus! The gift of Immanuel! The gift of God with us!

The joy of Christmas is the joy of reconciliation.

 If you are like most of us you know the sadness and pain of being at odds with someone---especially someone that you love, Maybe because of an argument or harsh or cruel words spoken in anger that have divided you from another.

 When this happens in human relationships we can feel a cold thick wall separating us from our spouse, child, friend or relative.

We know deep down in our heart that the only thing that will bring down this wall of cold separation is reconciliation.

 And if we knit things up with that person then we know and experience the joy reconciliation..

Clear back in the Garden of Eden there was a break in relationship between God and man.

When man disobeyed God for that first time fellowship and relationship with God was broken.

Our sin and rebellion have built a wall between us and God. Ever since that fateful day in Eden, humankind and God have been estranged.

Scripture says that we all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God.

We have all disobeyed and though that disobedience we have broken the heart of God and caused a chasm of separation between Him and us.

On that first Christmas morning over 2000 years ago God provided the way for reconciliation.

Jesus was born to break down that wall of separation from God.

Through what Jesus, this Christ child, this babe born in a manger in Bethlehem went on to do at Calvary’s cross, make the atoning sacrifice for your and my sin, we can be reconciled in relationship with God.

It is a joyful thing to be reconciled with a loved one we have been at odds with here on earth. How much more joyful is it to actually be able to truly be reconciled in our relationship with God?

Jesus is Gods Christmas gift to you and I…

Of all of the presents that you may have ever had under the Christmas tree, this gift of God is by far the most precious and costly gift that has ever been given.

But like all gifts before it will ever be appreciated or do us any good it needs to be received and opened.

For centuries people have searched for the proverbial fountain of youth, wondering if something somewhere can stop aging and give life anew.

 It is the search for immortality.

In our age of scientific advancement we are striving to find cures for all kinds of diseases.

Why? So we can live longer and better..

Once we receive, open and embrace Gods Christmas gift, the gift of salvation through Christ, our search for immortality is over!

For this gift satisfies our deepest longings—Eternal life..

God gives us this Gift of Christmas totally free because it is priceless.

It is given as a gift because no one could ever possible afford to buy it.

Who could possibly pay the price for a hundred billion eons of centuries in Paradise…in a new body that will never experience sickness, sorrow, suffering, pain or death?

Not even the richest of our world could afford to pay even one billionth of one percent of the value of this gift from God.

If you had received all the presents you ever dreamed of getting and even a thousand fold more, but you lay in your bed with your hands cold and your heat stopped, then what does it matter what gifts lie under the Christmas tree?

Jesus said in:
**Luke 9:25 (NIV)** **25What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?**

But God’s gift is eternal life in a place that Jesus Himself described as Paradise…

And unlike most of the gifts that we buy for those that we love, this Christmas gift of God has already been fully paid for! We don’t have to charge it or put it on account. Jesus paid its price, once and for all, at Calvary’s cross.

Upon that cross of agony, Jesus endured in body and soul the wrath of God, which is the wages of sin. The wages of our sin..

Christ paid the price, not with silver or gold or precious stones, but with His own blood.

Jesus is God’s gift of Himself to us! And it is the most precious, joyful and valuable gift that we can ever hope to receive in this life or in the life to come.

But like any gift if it is to do us any good, bring us any joy then we need to receive it, open it and embrace its content.

This Christmas as you look at all the presents under the tree will you contemplate the greatest gift of all?

The gift that was given that first Christmas morning wrapped as a babe lying in a manger? The gift of Jesus!

Have you received your gift from God this Christmas? Have you received it, opened it and embraced its content? Have you allowed Jesus to become the Lord and Savior of your life?

If you have then you truly have something to be joyful about this Christmas day!

If you have not then you can be joyful in knowing that the gift is at your feet and you need to just receive it, open it and embrace its contents for your life and God will give you the joy of Christmas, the joy of reconciliation with God…

**10But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.  11Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.**

Has this good news brought great joy to your heart and life this morning?

**A Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.**