



TIME OF GRACE®

Simply Christmas: Best. Gift. Ever.

Study Notes

Summary

Few things are as exciting as finding a Christmas gift labeled To: (You). The label means someone thought about you. Someone loved. Someone searched for just the right gift. No passage proves God's giving heart more than Luke 2:11, the classic summary of the gift of Christmas.

- **Luke 2: 10,11:** ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."
- Jesus is a big baby because he is . . .
 1. The _____ (the _____)
 2. The _____ (who gets the _____)
 3. The _____ (who _____ from _____)
- "We certainly are in need of heroes in 2017. . . . Wouldn't it be nice if there was somebody who can save us from all this, save us from ourselves, save us from the consequences of our actions and save us from people who are evil?"—Batman (Ben Affleck).
- **Luke 2:11,12:** ¹¹ "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Points to Ponder

1. Can you think of anyone in human history whose birth was anticipated more than Jesus? If so, who? If not, what set Jesus apart from billions of other babies?

2. Agree/Disagree: If Jesus was just a Savior and not a Lord, more people would follow him.

3. Study Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55. Find at least three connections between her lyrics and today's message.

Homework for Next Week

Read Luke 2:13,14.

*"Rejoice, that the immortal God is born, so that mortal man may live in eternity."
—John Huss*

Time of Grace Ministry
Simply Christmas: Best. Gift. Ever
Luke 2:11-12
December 15, 2019

Pastor Mike Novotny

And the angel showed up from the start and he said if you're going to have a connection to Jesus, if you're actually going to be a Christian, his disciple, his follower, if you're going to be with him in heaven, then there's only one way to do it: It's to bow your knee and call him your Lord. So why would you?

The other day, I was cleaning out a desk in my basement and I stumbled across this - a picture of my babies when they were just babies. And apparently, when they were totally terrified of the photographer at the mall. It made me so happy when I saw this old picture that I actually took a picture of the picture and I texted it to my wife and it made her really happy.

But I have a question for you today - how happy do my babies make you? Thank you, sir! That's kind of an awkward question to ask because I get it, these two little girls mean the world to me and to my wife. And I was thinking about that; like their birth - how many people did it actually make happy? The other parents, maybe we can count the four grandparents, my brother and his wife, my sister-in-law and her husband, the older cousin that was born, maybe a couple of close friends. But if I can actually count like numerically how many people rejoiced over the birth of those babies, it'd be what - twelve? Fifteen? Maybe 20 actual people? There'd been probably dozens, maybe hundreds of, you know, social media likes, people would have moved on after the baby pictures because it's hard for a baby to be a really big deal. You know, the national population bureau estimates that 60 billion babies have been born in the last 2,000 years. But how many of them do you hear about or even know about or much less care about? And the answer is probably very, very few.

Except for, Jesus. You ever thought about how crazy that is? That this season, 2 billion people on the planet - with a "b" - 2 billion people will celebrate the birth of Jesus. Now apparently, he was such a big, substantial, important baby that every time you write a date on your check or fill out an application online and put the year, you are referencing the birth of the biggest baby of all time. And it wasn't because his mom was famous; Mary didn't have like 200 people in the little town she lived in, much less 200 million Instagram followers. And yet, people got excited about the birth of Jesus. And not just today. On the night that Jesus was born, it wasn't just his mom and his step-dad that rejoiced; total strangers that we call shepherds showed up and rejoiced at the manger. People that had never met Mary or Joseph before, they traveled. The wise men, from distant lands; they took weeks off of work, away from their family and friends, just to be there and see this kid. And the question I want to wrestle with today is why? Like why is the birth of Jesus such a big deal? And my goal is to open the Bible and just study one or two verses with you today and prove that every time you see Jesus in a manger, every time you drive down the street and you see that little manger scene made out of plastic in the front yard, I want you to think in your head, "That's a big baby." Like, that baby right there is a big deal! Whether you're

kind of exploring Christianity for the first time or it's been a while since you've been in church or this is like Christmas number 70 for you as a Christian, I want all of us to be amazed and thrilled and actually sing glory to God because we realize what a huge kid Jesus is.

So we're going to cover two verses today; we're going to find three reasons to believe Jesus is a big baby. We're going to jump into the middle of a conversation in Luke 2 between an angel sent from God and a group of terrified shepherds. The angel just told them, "Don't be afraid. I'm coming with good news; it's good news for you. It will cause great joy for all the people," and here's what the angel said next. The angel said to the shepherds: "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." Now if you're taking notes in your program, there are all three answers to that question so let's start with the first one. The first reason that Jesus is a big baby is because he is the Messiah. That's what the angel said, which is a common word you might hear in church - that Jesus is the Messiah - but it begs the question: What exactly is a Messiah?

A Messiah is a Hebrew title. It's not Jesus' last name; Jesus Messiah. It's a word - "Mashiac" is how they'd say it in Hebrew - and it's actually the exact same word as the Greeks would say "Christ" or Christos. If you've ever heard someone say Jesus Christ, they're not saying that's his last name. That's actually a title; it'd be better to say Jesus is the Christ. And both those words - both the Hebrew Messiah and the Greek word Christ - mean anointed one. But what does that mean? It literally means the anointed one and you have to know a little bit of the ancient customs to grasp the power of that title. To anoint someone was to take a bunch of oil and pour it over their head, which seems like such a weird custom to me when I look back at it. You know, if you pour like olive oil over my head after church, I would not be thrilled or honored; I would be mad because I would be a hot mess and I'd have to go shower. But that's what they used to do back in the day. When someone was set apart as a very special person for a very special task or mission, they would be anointed.

Maybe the closest parallel that I came up with was the phrase that we hear so often in our culture, "the chosen one." Ever heard that before? Like this is someone really unique and special. All of us say like, this is the one, this is the chosen one. And in American culture, it's interesting to see where the chosen one comes out. If I'm going to tell you today that Jesus is the Messiah, essentially meaning he's the chosen one, what kind of comparisons do we have in American culture? Well, maybe some of you subscribe to Sports Illustrated back in the day because in 2002, SI put a picture of a basketball phenom, just a high school kid, on the front cover of one issue with the title the "Chosen One." And that high schooler was? LeBron James. Soon after he was given the title the chosen one, LeBron went to a tattoo shop and now across his massive, muscular shoulders, you can find that ink "chosen one." Because they thought this is going to be the guy, right? A special player with a special mission to save Cleveland and Miami and now LA from all their playoff basketball woes; like he's the one. But I got to thinking a little more deeply - wait, SI only gave him the title of the chosen one after they saw that he was someone unique and special and they weren't just picking some random basketball player. They saw he was this much better than all the other kids in high school and maybe he's going to be the next Jordan, the next phenom. So I wondered was anyone ever born with the title Messiah or Chosen One? And I actually found three answers to that question. Neo, from the Matrix, Harry Potter from Harry Potter, and Luke Skywalker from Star Wars. Beause you know,

all three of those stories, there were like these famous prophecies that one day someone was going to come; like this chosen one would be born and he would rescue the people from darkness and slavery and oppression. And so Neo would be the one who would go into the Matrix and liberate all humanity from their slavery. And Luke Skywalker would be the one who would go, you know, toe to toe with a sith and he would restore balance to the force. And Harry Potter would be the only one who would have the power to go against the dark lord, Voldemort, and free all the people so they could rejoice once more.

But do you know the problem with all those stories? They're stories. And if you were here a couple weeks ago, you might know that I told you Luke is written with a specific purpose; not to tell you some heartwarming story but to tell you history; what actually happened. And so he's trying to tell us, the angel was trying to tell the shepherds, like no, no, no; this is more than like some nice story for the holiday season. The one, the Messiah, has finally arrived. If you're looking to be freed from sin and slavery and darkness and oppression, if you're interested in peace and happiness and joy and liberation, then look to the manger in Bethlehem because the Messiah, the Christ, the Chosen One, has been born for you. Which is a really big deal. And if you're kind of new to the story of the Bible, you might not realize why that idea of God's chosen one was so huge to the Jewish people. So let me describe it like this: God knew that down here on earth, among us people, there was a problem. And the problem was that because all of us sinned that we lost our right to be connected to God. Like sin would mess up the perfect place called heaven. If God just opened the gates wide and every sinner could come in, then it wouldn't be heaven; it'd be hell because the same things that happen here on earth would happen there, too. But we people couldn't fix it; like how could we go back and undo all the things that we did and unsay the words that we said and change the thoughts of our heart? We couldn't fix it so God had a plan.

So up here in heaven, there were three people living in perfect happiness and harmony - God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And they weren't like lonely because they didn't have us; don't believe that Hallmark kind of garbage theology. They were perfectly content, self-sufficient, and satisfied. And yet, because they were so good and so merciful, those three came up with a plan to help us. And here's where the Messiah comes in: That God the Father anointed his son, whom we call Jesus, to come and do what no one else in human history had ever done. That the Messiah would be the chosen one among the people of the trinity to actually come down to earth; something the Father and the Spirit would never do. And here's what happened to Jesus - this is my very untheological prop for you - God came down from heaven and joined himself to man so that Jesus, like no one else in human history - no one before and no one after - could be like true God and true man in one person. And so if you read the Bible and you see Jesus and he's eating and sleeping and he's tired and he's hungry and he's being born, it's because he is a person; he's a human being. But when you see Jesus walking on water and calming storms and reading people's thoughts and raising the dead, it's because he's true God. He's God and man in one person. He has this chosen job but not just to be some neat party trick - "Hey! I'm God and man together" - but to help us, to change us, to rescue these people who cannot help themselves.

And so, the Jewish people for all their history had been aching and waiting; you know, promise after promise and person after person came but they would sin and they would sin, that can't be him, he would sin, he messed up, he can't be the Messiah, until one day, an angel came and said

to the shepherds, "I have good news for you! The One is here." Who will restore balance in your heart and your mind, who will rescue you from the dark lord that we call sin, death and hell, who will save you for a brighter future. When that baby was born, it was such a big deal shepherds, wise men, and even angels came to celebrate the day.

So that's the first reason Jesus is a big baby. And let me read to you the second one: "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord." So if you're taking notes, there's answer number two: Jesus is a huge deal because he is the Lord, which once again, begs my favorite question, well, what does that mean? A lord, I'd say in simple terms, is simply someone who gets the last word. Someone who has enough authority that they get the final call, the deciding vote, and the last word. If you work in a company and you don't get to make the ultimate decision, whoever does is the lord at your work. If you're running a play and your quarterback and everyone has an opinion about what they should do, the person who makes that final call is the lord on the field. In the Bible, lord is not only connected to authority but often to possession. So if something is yours and you own it, you get to be its lord, which is why I cannot take your car keys and go for a joyride in your truck, right? Because you'd say, "That's mine; like you don't have the authority to do what you want with my stuff." And so when the angel shows up, he says this really curious thing; that a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord.

And can I be really honest with you? This is the hard part. In fact, the reason, I think, that Jesus himself - you know, God comes down to earth and he walks around for 33 years. His full-time job is preaching, teaching, and miracle working and do you know how many people join Jesus' church at the end of three years? About a hundred. Like in this room right now, like triple that amount. Why do you think God walking around, teaching perfectly, living without sin, no hypocrisy, no scandal in the church of Jesus, doing miracles, feeding 5,000, healing the sick, raising the dead. Why did he have such a tiny church? And I think the simple answer is because Jesus was the Lord. And it's the same today. I'll be honest with you, if you're new to church, the toughest part of being a Christian is that you don't get the last word about anything. Like Jesus only wants that one kind of relationship with you and it's not just as a guide or a teacher or a hire by the Sunday counselor. He doesn't want you to knock on his door when you have cancer or you're scared of dying and then maybe he can fix it with his divine power. No, if you're going to have any connection to Jesus at all, it has to be with Jesus as Lord; that he just gets the last word with everything. So what you think about food and alcohol, how much do you eat, how much do you drink, what age do you start drinking, if at all, Jesus gets the last word. What do you do with your body? With your pregnancy? With your sexuality? With your thoughts? Is it your body or does Jesus possess it and gets the last word? What do you say about other people? Your parents? Our government? Those who've hurt you? Jesus gets the last word. What about your money? Can anyone tell you what to do with that? Well, if it was your money, no. But if it's Jesus because he's God, then he gets the last word. What you think about church and organized religion and the Bible and pastors and the world, Jesus gets the last word. Which means any time you read something that Jesus said in the Bible that doesn't seem right to you, it's not that Jesus is wrong; it's that you are. And that's the hard part.

See, many people in modern culture want Jesus as Savior but not as Lord. They want the throne of Jesus Christ to be a loveseat where we can snuggle in and get the final call on everything but

that's not how it works. And the angel showed up from the start and he said if you're going to have a connection to Jesus, if you're actually going to be a Christian, his disciple, his follower, if you're going to be with him in heaven, then there's only one way to do it: It's to bow your knee and call him your Lord.

So why would you? That's probably not the best sales pitch for Christianity, right? "Hey, whatever you thought about everything - sorry; don't care." What did Jesus say? So why would anyone become a Christian? And if I had to summarize the answer to that massively important question with a picture, the picture would be this. Did you know that I am these girls lord? I get the last word. When we sit down to talk about dessert, they're not asking my opinion. Like, I'm going to make the final call. We can talk and we can discuss and they can ask for whatever they want but guess who gets to decide? Dad, right? And so no, if you want to get a smartphone at the age of seven, that's not happening because I'm the lord of this household. And if you want to eat a gallon of ice cream even though you didn't touch your vegetables, like sorry, no, thanks for your opinion but I get to make the final call. And yet, what I hope these girls have learned in the past decade is that daddy's not just the lord but he's a lord of love. I hope that all the sacrifices I've made for them, all the time and energy I've given to them, all the dates that I've taken them on, all the gifts that I've bought them, all the hugs, all the kisses, all the devotions, all the tucking in at night have convinced them I'm not just some cruel tyrant who wants to get the last word for some power trip. But I'm leveraging my lordship in their life for their eventual good. And they might understand that on some days and other days not, but I hope they know enough about my heart, my character, and my relationship with them to trust me as the one who gets the last word.

And it's the same with Jesus. Like he does insist on being the Lord with everything. He wants you to change your mind - the word is "repent" in the Bible - and agree with him. But he doesn't just tell you to change your mind. Instead, he gives the ultimate example; that he is the Lord of love. That if there's someone who's sacrificed and given more for you, I can't even think of him because Jesus gave up everything to prove that his lordship is connected to his life. And I know that because of what the angel said the day he was born. He's the Messiah, yes, and he's the Lord, yes. But why is he a lord we can trust? Well, that's my third answer for you today: Because he's also the Savior. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

Do you know what the word "Savior" means? If you're a Christian and you said "Jesus saves me," could you put that in terms a kindergartener would get? Here's my simple definition of that. A savior is someone who rescues from danger. So because I'm kind of a Bible nerd, I printed out a 70-page study of all the uses of the Greek word for "savior" in ancient Greek and Roman and biblical cultures. I skimmed it, in full honesty, but I learned a couple things. I learned that in all the ancient uses of the word, savior means to rescue someone from danger. And in all the instances of the word, it is never a cooperation; it's always a solo mission, right? So if I flew down on a helicopter and I was reaching down and say, "Jump and grab my hand!" and you jumped with all of your muscles and we grabbed and we pulled you up to save you, in the Greek language, that's not salvation. Salvation is when you're passed out on the ground and the enemy's coming in and you're in danger, you're about to die, and someone swoops in and grabs you. If you're passed out in your home because there's a fire and the smoke has gotten into your system and the firefighter busts in, hauls you out over your shoulder, you've been saved. Or you

don't know how to swim and you're like 30 seconds from drowning and the lifeguard jumps in and drags you back to the shore, you're saved. And the angel shows up and he says, "Today, in the town of David, not a teacher, not a counselor - a Savior - has been born to you." The one who rescues you from danger, which is the coolest thing about Christmas, right? At Christmas, we celebrate that God singlehandedly helped us. This crazy, like oppressive ideas in many religious circles - sometimes even in Christian churches - that sound really, really good but they will just cripple you with fear and anxiety. Ideas like am I good enough for God? Have I jumped high enough to grab Jesus' hand to get to heaven? Am I a good person? Because good people go to heaven, right? But can you imagine believing that? There always has to be this question mark in your mind but am I good enough? Like compared to some people that I know, sure, but is that enough? What is God's standard? Am I good enough? Like if Jesus was just giving you a couple rules to keep to be a good person, to be right with God, that wouldn't be good news of great joy; that'd be crippling uncertainty. Five hundred years ago, Martin Luther called it the monster of uncertainty because you could never be positive you were right with God, which is why Jesus is such a big baby. A Savior has been born. Like, singlehandedly, Jesus does it.

And I don't care who you are today, that is such incredible news. Because let's say this is your first time in church and this is sounding incredible and you think, "Oh my goodness, I have to catch up to all these other people. They've been Christians for five years or 50 years," but listen, it's not a race. It's not you working hard to catch up to everyone else. It's Jesus, supernaturally flying to the finish line of forgiveness and in a moment, you're right with God. I mean, you could walk into this church as a non-Christian and leave it completely right with God and ready to see him face to face because Jesus is a Savior.

And if you're a longtime Christian, this is such good news because you know what you've learned? Like you still need to be saved! I think that's the burden of being a Christian for decades and decades; that you just think, you would assume, that I'd be better by now like man, I thought I wouldn't be so quick to lose my temper over something stupid but I still do and I've known Jesus for so long and I shouldn't worry but I still do. But Jesus is a Savior. And he cares if you're still battling addiction or sin or struggle but he's not waiting for that to be fixed until he loves you and saves you. Instead, just by himself, singlehandedly, he makes things right with God.

It reminds me of this great quote from Batman. Well, not the real Batman; the guy who played Batman. You know the Justice League movie came out a while back and Ben Affleck, who played Batman, he had this great quote with USA Today. Tell me what you think of when you read it. Here's what he said. He said, "We certainly are in need of heroes. Wouldn't it be nice if there was someone who could save us from all this? Save us from ourselves? Save us from the consequences of our actions and save us from people who are evil?" Well yes, that would be nice! I wish I could think of someone. A Savior has been born, the angel said, and it's really good news. We look at the world around us and things are so messed up and we look at the stuff within us. I love that part about his quote. Could he save us from ourselves and the consequences of our actions? And the angels answer is "yes."

And so, I want to tell you as clearly as I can. I don't know what you've done, I don't know what you struggle with, but if you come to Jesus today and you say, "Jesus, I can't do this. You have to do everything or I cannot be with God." He does it in an instant. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved because God so loved the world, he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Friends, that's why Jesus is a big deal. So put it all together and what do we have? We have Luke 2: "Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord." To you, these shepherds, you church people, you black sheep, whatever your story is, a Savior has been born to you. And the angel was so kind, he even told the shepherds where to find him. In Luke 2:12, our last verse for today, "This will be a sign to you," think of a sign, a road sign, points you to something you can't yet see. "You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." There might have been a handful of babies in Bethlehem so how are they going to know which one is the Savior, Messiah, and Lord? Well, not many were humble enough to be put in a manger except Jesus; a hint of the humble death he'd die on the cross because Jesus is a big deal.

And so, 2,000 years, here we are. We're making cookies, writing Christmas letters, cards, billions of people will celebrate the birth of this child. Which means that the birth of Jesus is even more important than the birth of Bubba. Have you met Bubba at our church yet? Bubba is the nickname of the son of two of my really good friends, Shane and Rebecca, and that kid makes me really happy. Shane and Rebecca said I could share their story with you today because Bubba makes me smile. You see, about a decade ago, Rebecca got pregnant and gave birth to a beautiful daughter named Callen and then Shane and Rebecca wanted to expand their family so she got pregnant again except sadly, this time she miscarried. And so she got pregnant a third time, but then miscarried a second time. And then she miscarried a third time and a fourth, a fifth, and sixth, a seventh, and an eighth. And that's when I met them; in a Bible study in my home. They became good friends and it was almost surreal; they would announce a pregnancy except it was hard for them to smile because they kind of knew what was going to happen again. And so we'd pray for them and the weeks would go by but then again, a miscarriage. And then a pregnancy and it would break our hearts and so when Rebecca got pregnant, we didn't break out the party hats and cake; we held our breath. And the weeks went by and then the weeks turned into months and the first trimester turned into the second and then the second into the third and then I'll show you a picture - this happened. Bubba was born. A little Calvin Johnson and here's a little picture of him today and every time I see that kid, it makes me so happy. I look at him and say, "You're here!" Like, you're actually with us.

Kind of like Jesus. Maybe you've been waiting a long, long time to find unconditional love and forgiveness and someone who has the power to help you and enough love to want to. And the angel said, "He's here. Just stare at him and adore him." Because this isn't just some baby that Mary and Joseph will celebrate. This is the Messiah, the Christ, the Lord, Savior. So brothers, sisters, let's make a big deal out of baby Jesus. He's worthy of every word of praise that we give.

Let's pray. Jesus, we love you because you love us no matter what. I know you take sin seriously, Jesus, and yet, at the same time, no matter how many sins happen today, there is still such good news for us because you're a God of unconditional love. I thank you, Jesus, that this

religion, this faith, is so different. The world tries to tell us that all religions are the same but this isn't. Every religion makes us earn it and you just give it as a gift. So thank you that a place in heaven, a place in God's family, is unconditional; it comes through faith and not by works. Thank you that you don't make us catch up to other people who are better than us. Right now, you are famous for loving adulterers and prostitutes and tax collectors and sinners and thieves and shepherds and people just like us. So God, help us to celebrate you today. Every time we see a picture of baby Jesus, help us not to get used to it and to simply be amazed that you would leave the perfect comfort of heaven to walk among us to suffer and die so that we could be saved. Thank you, Jesus, for being a big deal. Open our eyes to realize that more than ever this Christmas season that we could rejoice and be glad because a Savior has been born. We pray this in your powerful, beautiful, and saving name, Amen.