

With only six more shopping days until Christmas I have a few gift ideas for you if you don't know what to get that special someone, (thanks to David Reed for old ads)...How things change right? Lung cancer, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome...these are gifts that keep on giving!

I want you to know that there really are some gifts that keep on giving. And I want you to make sure you have them this Christmas. Let's take a look at the Christmas story...Mt. 1:18-25.

I. The gift of the Holy Spirit...v. 18. The Holy Spirit is the gift that keeps on giving because of His role in God becoming man. God, the second person of the Trinity, took on human form but the Bible makes it clear that Joseph had nothing to do with it. Matthew's Gospel begins with a lengthy genealogy showing Jesus' family history that ends with, "**Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, by whom was born Jesus who is called the Messiah.**" (v. 16). Then in verse 18, "**Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.**" Verse 19 presents Joseph's dilemma – he is "righteous" meaning he wants to do what is right but he loves Mary and is no doubt confused and disappointed. In verse 20 you read that the angel was sent to Joseph at night in a dream and tells him about the supernatural aspect of this pregnancy: "**But when he had considered this (putting her away), behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."**

The biblical account presents the idea that Jesus was born of a virgin. Luke's Gospel records Mary's surprise when she learns she is pregnant. She said, "**How can this be since I am a virgin?**" (Lk. 1:34). This is one of those Bible stories that is hard for some to accept. After all, we know how babies are made. But when the Bible speaks of God's "only begotten Son" it is not emphasizing that Jesus is an only child. Jesus is God's "one-of-a-kind Son" who experienced a one-of-a-kind birth. Why is it important for us to believe that? Without the virgin birth the cross would have no power. Without the virgin birth, Jesus would be just an ordinary man unable to save anyone because He himself would need a savior. If we eliminate the virgin birth, we remove the power of the cross to save us. Eternal life is found only in a relationship with Jesus. "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life...**" Unless the Holy Spirit lives within you, you will not experience the abundant life Jesus talked about. Jesus said, "**It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.**" Jn. 6:63.

The Good News of Christmas is that our Father wants to give us the gift of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist said, "**For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure.**" Jn. 3:34. Jesus said, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those

who ask Him?” **Luke 11:13.** I need the Holy Spirit because I need life, the kind of life that keeps on giving. There is a second gift mentioned in this passage...

II. The gift of angels...vv. 19-21. If you have the Holy Spirit within you, you also enjoy the supernatural presence of angelic beings watching over you and coming alongside you to help you. Angels are everywhere in the Christmas Story. It was an angel who appeared to Zacharias and told him he would have a son named John. An angel appeared to Mary and told her she would have a child. An angel appeared to shepherds announcing the birth of a Savior and then was joined by a multitude of angelic beings. An angel appeared to Joseph and told him to get out of Dodge (Bethlehem) when Herod started slaughtering infants. When Herod died the angel paid a return visit telling Joseph it was safe to return to Israel.

Angels are for real. They are servants of God and they have gotten a lot of attention in recent years. Our secular society is so hopelessly materialistic that people are desperately searching for some spiritual or supernatural meaning. The Bible isn't cool to some but apparently angels are. That's why books abound on this subject. They not only claim encounters with angels, but instruct people on how to contact them. There was even a T.V. show on one of the major networks about angels. Remember "Touched By An Angel?" The show not only demonstrated our fascination with this subject, but also illustrated a poor grasp of what the Bible says about it. Most popular teaching on angels includes a lot of distortions of Scripture.

The Bible doesn't tell us much about angels, and that's probably a good thing. Why? Because God knows that we would become so sidetracked and fascinated by peripheral issues that we would endanger our own souls. Angels can't save us, only Jesus can.

In the Bible angels function as messengers who communicate the truth about Jesus. Their appearance inspires fear initially but shaking knees and worried hearts grow calm as they dispatch their message. Angels often appear in dreams (1:20, 24). We are hearing more and more reports of Muslims having dreams in which they are told about Jesus by an angelic being.

Angels are described by the author of Hebrews as, “**ministering spirits sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?**” (**Hb. 1:14**). We don't worship angels. We don't pray to angels. We don't become preoccupied with angels. That would be like becoming preoccupied with the wrapping paper and completely ignoring the gift. But we thank God for these gifts that keep on giving. You are surrounded by angelic beings sent by God to minister to you. I don't know how or how many. I don't know their names, their rank or their heavenly serial number but I know they exist and that they exist to bring glory to God by magnifying Jesus. They do not compete with Jesus for glory and honor. The only one who ever did was sent away from God's presence forever. The Bible indicates that angels do their work and then disappear. If you have never seen an angel, one day you will, I promise.

Ken Gangel says, “So you’ve never seen or heard an angel? Be patient—I guarantee it will happen. Like John we’ll all someday see and hear “the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand.” With them we will praise the Savior singing, “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” Dr. Gangel left this earth to join the heavenly chorus two years ago.

III. The gift of prophets...vv. 22-25. We need God’s prophetic word, the gift of revelation. We need for God to reveal to us what life is about, that there is a purpose behind it all. God gave us prophets to do just that. Prophecy is another prominent theme in the Christmas story. Pay attention to the capital letters in your Bible. Those are OT quotes from the prophets who were looking for a Savior. Isaiah told us He would be born of a Virgin (7:14). He would live in Galilee (9:1). His coming would be announced by one like Elijah (40:3). His mission would include Gentiles (42:1-4) and His ministry would be one of healing (53:4). Micah told us He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Hosea said He would travel to Egypt (Hosea 11:1). Jeremiah predicted His coming would cause a massacre of Bethlehem’s children (Jeremiah 31:15).

Matthew 1:22 says, “**All this took place so that the word of the Lord might be fulfilled.**” What word? Isaiah’s word quoted in 1:23, “**THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,**” which translated means, “**GOD WITH US.**” (Is. 7:14). Immanuel – doesn’t just mean God “with us.” It means God became “one of us.” God became man in order to communicate in a way we can understand. Jesus is God’s final Word. John 1:1,14,18 . For over 300 years there was no prophetic word. No indication of the next phase of God’s plan. John recognizes Jesus as “the Word.” He was the conveyance to deliver the very thoughts and purposes of God to the earth...Heb. 1:1-3 says that, “**God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.**”

I’m so thankful for God’s prophetic word. Apart from the light of His revelation we stumble around in the dark, ignorant of His plan and purpose. Ignorance is not sin. It is symptomatic of our finiteness. We have limited understanding of the world around us and of the God who made us. We all suffer from the “bug in the bottle syndrome.” When my kids used to catch bugs and put them in a bottle I would often ask, “Do you think they know anything about us? They may know they are trapped. They may know that someone big and powerful is outside the bottle but they don’t have the capacity to know us. If we could become a bug and crawl in the bottle we could explain what’s going on. That’s what Jesus did when He became a man.”

Every year at this time Jana asks, “What do you want for Christmas.” I always give the same answer. Every man in here knows what it is. Men, what do you want for Christmas?
“NOTHING.” But it’s not really true...at least for me. I want to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that I can live the abundant life Jesus promised. I want to be surrounded by angels helping me accomplish what I’m supposed to accomplish. And I want to be full of God’s prophetic word so that I might be able to help others who are lost in the darkness. That’s what I want, how about you? These are the gifts that keep on giving.