

## INTRO:<sup>1</sup>

Well, very good evening to you! Welcome again to our Christmas Eve...Eve gathering. For those of you whom I've not gotten the chance to meet, My name is Charlie and I enjoy the privilege of serving as one of the leaders here at Hub. And it's REALLY an honor to have you here tonight/ that you would dedicate a portion of your Christmas festivities to being with us is not a small thing...Cuz ya know, one of the things I've learned about Christmas/maybe you can relate to this - is it is perhaps, THE most complicated time of year. Of course other times of year are complicated too. For you single folks, I know Valentine's Day tends to be particularly... awful, while for you married folks/parents, things like anniversaries/Mother's Day/Father's Day can be challenging too, given the gift-giving component involved. But at Christmas *right*, it's like all those things and more collide into this supernova of complexity. Cuz of course, ya gotta give the right gifts/ya gotta give ENOUGH gifts, make travel plans, navigate awkward family dynamics, get the Christmas Cards out on time/Heck just get your kids to put PANTS on so you can get a Christmas card in the first place...I even learned this week that a survey of 2,000 people found that folks are willing to spend an AVERAGE of 3 hours and 54 minutes with their family during the holidays BEFORE needing a break.<sup>2</sup>...Which apart from the fact that 3 hours and 54 minutes feels less like an average and more like some teen girl going, "*I can't take another minute of this.*"...it just further makes the point that: the complexity of Christmas is enough to drive any sane person...insane! Which is WHY - at least when it comes to the gift-giving aspect of it all - most of us resort to that little piece of manna from God above, we call...the gift card...(Ah Ah Ah)...Cuz of course why go to Target GUESSING what to get for that loved one, when you could graciously let em go...themselves! The whole thing is SUPER complex!... Which is unfortunate, since the BASIS for the whole thing - the MESSAGE of Christmas - really is quite *simple*...And so if I could give you any gift this year/wish for you to RECEIVE any gift this year, it would be for you to see and ultimately believe in the *SIMPLE* message of Christmas. SO in our few minutes together this evening, I wanna make things real *simple* for you and tell you that, while we as a church family have been going through the *Gospel of John* together each Sunday, TONIGHT, we're looking at 1 verse in the *Gospel of Luke: Luke chapter 2 verse 11*, which you can see printed there in your Order of Gathering. Because in this ONE verse, you get distilled out, the central and SIMPLE message of Christmas. Which is: that **an announcement has been made, that GOD, has given you the gift...of a Savior!** *An announcement that God, has given you the gift, of a Savior!* So if you would, let's briefly unpack that message together...

## TEXT:

BECAUSE I really believe we're at a time in history where we're aching for some good news *right*/for an announcement of SOMETHING good, given what feels like a constant deluge of BAD or just fake news these days. When the Gospel Writer Luke, who we know was a doctor and an eye-witness to the life and ministry of Jesus, WRITES here that "*unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord,*" what he's doing is recording the

<sup>1</sup> Works consulted:

- "Christmas 2011 // Luke 2:11; John 1:12" - J.D. Greear

- "Good News Great Joy All People" - Jon Tyson - 12/18/18 - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/church-of-the-city-new-york/id1245313998?i=1000426042832>

<sup>2</sup> <https://thehill.com/changing-america/well-being/mental-health/3781806-americans-can-tolerate-less-than-4-hours-with-family-on-holidays-survey-finds/>

**announcement** the angels gave to a group of shepherds in a field, ABOUT the arrival of Jesus Christ! In other words, he's taking what the world at the time/what many people today considered to be an insignificant event - voices in a field, to a bunch of no-name shepherds - and essentially organized all of human history around it. Cuz we all know **right?** certainly if you've ever watched a Disney movie - that most stories start out with something like, "*once upon a time,*" or "*somewhere in a galaxy far far away.*" Even most religions or self-help books BEGIN with a set of teachings, doctrines, and principles that are considered true apart from who said em. But not Luke here! LUKE begins the story of Jesus by talking about an event that happened in time and space/an **announcement** that actually occurred. What other parts of the Bible call "Gospel"/literally "good news." Not advice, but news. Because of course, advice is only helpful if you appropriate it **right?** Whereas NEWS is true REGARDLESS of if you believe it or not. If a newscaster tells you a hurricane's coming, that's not advice; that's news! It's coming whether you choose to believe it or not...Friend, the most important feature of Christmas and ultimately Christianity is that it's actual history. Not primarily tradition, or nostalgia, though both of those are wonderfully a part of it, but news! The **announcement** of something that actually happened.

But what kind of announcement? Cuz I'm sure why each of you are here tonight. But I do know that a lot of people come to a service like this, and rather than getting the announcement of something good, they get the announcement of something...eh. Ya know, something more along the lines of how to become a better person, and a little less naughty and more nice. Or maybe specifically, GOD showing you how bad you are at being human, but then kinda giving you another shot, just with some higher consequences of...heaven and hell. It's "ok news!" And I say "ok," cuz I don't know about you, but I'm not really good at...being good. I mean sure I can occasionally be polite. I'll probably be polite to you tonight...But like with the real stuff in my heart? I'm just not so good at that. And so being told, like the new Christmas movie "Spirited" does, that no matter how bad you are, if ya work hard and do better, you'll eventually redeem yourself, and if there's not enough time for ya to do that in this life, then you can spend the next one trying too. - You all, at best, that's exhausting and at worst, depressing. And it's definitely NOT the good news of a **Savior** you see in our verse, God announced He gifted to the world.

Cuz of course, when we think of the word "Savior"/"salvation" we tend to think of some kind of flight out of the world or just out of some difficult circumstances **right?**...But as the scholar D.A. Carson said, "*If God had perceived that your greatest need was circumstantial; ya know economic for example, He would've sent you an economist. If He'd perceived it was entertainment, He woulda sent you a comedian, an artist, or just a free Netflix login. If He'd perceived it was political stability, He woulda sent a politician. Health? - a doctor.*" But He didn't! He sent you a "**Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**" Because He KNEW your greatest need (and mine) involves your sin, your alienation from Him, your rebellious desire to do life on your own terms rather than His...and your subsequent death. In other words, God descending TO you rather than YOU, in any way, ascending to Him. **You see that?** Christmas is God's annual, stubborn reminder that your salvation can NEVER be earned. Cuz we're all just way too full of sin. And I know ya might not use that word/we've kinda removed spiritual language from our culture; but we still understand the concept **right?** Just think about how we talk about things like

justice, reconciliation, brokenness, anxiety, or the big one...shame - this idea that something is fundamentally wrong with me and FROM which I need **saving**! Like a glass of milk with even just an ounce of urine in it OR a vile of blood with just a trace of Aids virus in it, we're too corrupted by sin to in any way make ourselves pure and worthy of salvation. Which is EXACTLY why God has gifted you a **Savior** in Jesus!

Cuz you understand, in Jesus, you have One who did FOR you, what you could NEVER do for yourself; namely, live the perfect life you should've lived, and then die the death you were condemned to die. And in BETWEEN, graciously enter into your humanity. **Why do you think God's announcement of a Savior came at Jesus' birth? Why not announce it at His resurrection when salvation was complete?** Was it just because, as Ricky Bobby said, "8lb 6oz newborn baby Jesus, who don't even know a word yet," makes for a sweeter story? No! It's because **what's a baby?** As Tim Keller says, "a baby is the most intimate and familiar form of human existence. You pick em up and they're always there for you. Ya hug em and kiss em and they're always completely open, accessible, completely...vulnerable." Jesus Christ/the **Savior** of the world, was born as one of these open, accessible, vulnerable babies - not because He had to - I mean He's God after all. He coulda come any way He wanted. BUT IN coming to you like this, it closed the gap of separation between you and God. Between humanity and divinity...And I know that might sound a little crazy. I mean like really, why would GOD manifest Himself as a human, much less a baby human? But let me ask you: **How else SHOULD He've manifested Himself?** I mean, If He's really a God who loves and wants a relationship with you, what better way to do it than to actually ENTER into your experience? Cuz Friend, that's what the birth of Jesus at Christmas means! It means/**listen**: God is human enough to feel what you feel, yet God enough to fix it! Human enough to feel what you feel, yet God enough to fix it! So that when you come to Him in your weakness and failure, He doesn't meet you with condemnation...but with compassion. Says, "oh yeah, I know what that feels like. Been there, done that. Got the t-shirt... but didn't fail. I felt it but didn't fail it. And I can give you everything you need to overcome it/to be **saved**."<sup>3</sup> WHAT AN AMAZING ANNOUNCEMENT! That Jesus is not just your **savior**, but literally "God with you!" Cuz of course, a **savior** who's not WITH you, leaves you in fear/some of you know that fear all too well. But someone who's merely WITH you, but not a **savior**, is just a mascot who can't actually help you in the ups and downs of life. Friend, the simple message of Christmas is not "be better, and do better," but rather: **An announcement has been made, that GOD has given you the gift of Savior! And His name is Jesus! Do you believe that?**

Cuz I know many people/maybe YOU struggle TO believe that. Or even more, to believe that even if it's true, that it would be for you. Cuz you're thinking, "Pastor, you don't know me. You don't know what I've done. You don't know what's been done TO me. In other words, "You don't know my pedigree." And we all know Boston is a city of pedigrees. "Where'd ya go to Highschool?" "Noble/Milton Academy/Phillips Andover, which was great, but then I went to Yale, studied law at Harvard, got tired of that, so I got a phd in Economics at MIT and now since I've got some free time, I'm doing a fellowship at Mass General." ...And can I just tell ya: every

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from quote by Brian Loritts - <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CmZ1TPHA9sR/>

time I wanna be like, “*well I done learnt how ta spell.*” But I don’t, cuz I’m afraid, cuz pedigrees are how we frame ourselves, to the point that we ASSUME it’s how GOD frames us too, which means this announcement can’t possibly be for me... Friend, what you gotta see, is that it’s EXACTLY for you. Cuz remember, when Luke says there, “*unto YOU is born this day in the city of David a SAVIOR, who is Christ the Lord,*” the “you” is in reference to the shepherds. Shepherds being invited to come worship King Jesus. But here’s the thing, those shepherds weren’t nobles or even particularly noble. They were poor, uneducated nomads and weren’t even considered to be upstanding members of society. Actually according to the Talmud, which was the central text for Rabbinic Judaism, the testimony of a shepherd wasn’t even admissible in court.<sup>4</sup> If pedigree is what we assume we need, they had whatever the OPPOSITE of pedigree is!... ***And ya know what?*** That’s the point! God made the announcement to THEM, because He was declaring that He came NOT for those who have a proud sense of accomplishment, but for those of you who have an acute awareness of your need. For those of you whose lives AREN’T characterized by “winning at life.”... The cancer patient, who’s found out they’re not going into remission. The man or woman who feels a suffocating sense of despair this year because it is their first Christmas without a loved one. For the one who was devastated this year by divorce, job-loss, or just overwhelming regret. And maybe ESPECIALLY for you if you’re feeling lost, separated from God or in any way condemned! THAT’S who God came for!

And so Friend, if the **simple** message of Christmas is that: ***God has once again announced that He has a gift for you - the gift of a Savior*** - then the application is to simply receive that gift! Don’t try to “UN-shepherd yourself,” as it were, by attempting to change before you come to Jesus. No! Come to Him LIKE a shepherd, meaning right where you are, and as dirty as you are! Because at the end of the day: That’s the essential nature of a gift. A gift isn’t earned; it’s received... ***Have you received it?*** And I don’t just mean you’re here or striving to be better. Going to church, participating in traditions and sacraments, trying to be a better parent, spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend, neighbor doesn’t mean you’ve received it AND might even be a way of MASKING the fact that you’ve NOT received it. No! Receiving it, like with any gift, means taking and enjoying it! Or as Luke says here, letting Jesus be, not just your Savior, but your “*Lord!*”... the center of your life!... ***Can I tell you,*** THAT’S the story of a number of the people sitting around you tonight. People who aren’t doing less sin in an effort to become better versions of themselves, but people who’ve done A LOT of sin/a lot of bad things, and realized they could never work their way back to God, and so have opened themselves to Jesus’ grace, peace, forgiveness, and salvation... People who’ve been eternally washed because of the sacrifice of Christ... People who thought they were alone but found real love at the right hand of Jesus. You’re surrounded by people who not only know that they matter because of what Jesus has done for em, but as a result have found peace with God and themselves... It’s for YOU! And my prayer FOR you/if I could give you any gift this year, it would be: that for the first time or just in a fresh way, you’d see, believe and rejoice: That **an announcement has been made, which is that GOD, has given you the gift...of Savior!...Amen?** Amen!

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<sup>4</sup> Talmud, Sanhedrin 25b