

The 12 Days Of Christmas

by Jeff Strite
Ezekiel 17:22-17:24

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yc00HVMkaXY> (acapella – fade out at 3:00)

Did you notice how much fun those guys had singing that song? That's the way it ought to be because Christmas is a fun time of the year. There's another Christmas song that says that Christmas is the "hap-happiest time of the year" and it is. School is out, houses are brightly decorated and the air is filled with joyful songs of the season.

But Christmas can also be a very expensive time of the year. For most people, it's a time to buy presents for the family, and that's the theme of that song: "The 12 Days Of Christmas". It's all about... buying presents.

According to PNC bank, if you were to buy/rent the gifts mentioned in that song it would cost:

\$ 214.99 for the Partridge in the pear tree

\$ 290 for the two Turtledoves

\$ 181.50 for the 3 French Hens

\$ 599.96 for the 4 Calling Birds

Five Golden Rings would set you back \$ 750

Six Geese a laying would cost \$ 360

Seven Swans a swimming – \$ 13,125

To hire the 8 Maids amilking – \$ 58

Nine Ladies Dancing would cost \$ 7552.84

10 Lord aleaping would charge \$5508.70

11 Pipers piping could be rented for \$ 2635.20

And 12 Unionized Drummers drumming would go for \$ 2854.80

GRAND TOTAL = 34,130.99

(<https://www.pncchristmaspriceindex.com/cpi/#giftprices>)

Christmas is usually not THAT expensive but it can set you back a fair amount of money! I've heard a lot of people talk about how much they spend on gifts for their families. Many spend at least \$100 on each of their kids and maybe more for their spouse. Then there's the \$50 or \$60 they spend on parents or other relatives.

One person once said: "Anyone who says it's the thought that counts usually can't afford what they'd like to get for you."

Now this brings us to the birth of Jesus. When God gave us His Son, it doesn't seem

like He invested much in this gift. When it came to sending His Son to us as a gift it's almost as if God went to Goodwill and wrapped it in newspaper.

- When God sent his son He was raised by a struggling couple who were just common Jews
- And when Jesus was born, it was in one of the most insignificant villages of the day.
- He was born in a barn.
- Laid in a feeding trough.

And then - when God sent His angels out to announce the birth of the Messiah - who does He send them to? (Shepherds)

You'd think God would at least send them to Kings or Priests or men of influence, and to prominent cities like Jerusalem or Athens or Rome. But nooo! God sends the hosts of heaven to shepherds keeping watch flocks over their flock in the field.

One preacher noted: "Shepherds were despised and unwanted. They were unimportant - personally, politically, and financially." (Phil Ware, 12/4/11, heartlight.org)

In our text this morning, when God described the coming of the Messiah He said: "I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots..." Ezekiel 17:22

Jesus was going to come forth as a "shoot"... a "tender sprig".

That's not real impressive.

But then, when Jesus came, He WASN'T real impressive.

And that's just the way God had planned it.

This same message is driven home time and again in the prophets.

In Isaiah 53:2 God said this:

"He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

Notice... there's that "tender shoot" thing again.

And God stresses that this Messiah won't be impressive.

No beauty. No majesty. Nothing to make Him attractive or desirable to us.

(PAUSE)

Now, why on earth would God do it that way?

Well because that was exactly the present He intended to give us.

ILLUS: When people buy gifts for others for Christmas - if they like you - they'll

spend a lot of time THINKING about just the right gift to get. It may not even cost a great deal of money... but it doesn't have to. All this gift has to do is be something that said "you mattered enough to me for me to spend my time getting JUST THE RIGHT gift for you.

Years ago when my family exchanged Christmas gifts – I wondered what to get my brother. I really like and admire my brother and I wanted to get him something special. But Jack is a fairly wealthy man and could have bought anything he wanted anytime he wanted.

Then I recalled a story he told me about when he first got married. He'd bought an Aston-Martin car. It didn't run real well, so he took it apart, took all the parts down into his basement and cleaned and worked on everything. Then he took everything back upstairs and put the car all back together again. He only had one or two parts left over, but he'd loved that car.

Remembering that story I knew what I wanted to get him. I got on the internet and found a "Revel" model of an Aston-Martin and got it just in time for Christmas. It didn't cost me a lot, but it told my brother that I'd looked for just the right gift for him.

That's what God did when He sent Jesus.
He sent JUST THE RIGHT GIFT.
Jesus came to be exactly what we needed.

You see there was something about how this Messiah was wrapped that was part of that gift. And it's revealed in part of Ezekiel's prophecy:
"I the LORD bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish." Ezekiel 17:24

That's almost the same prophecy Isaiah declared about John the Baptist
"Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low..." Isaiah 40:4

You know what God is saying there?
He's saying that He was going to level the playing field.
He's going to take the insignificant and the undesirable parts of society.
He's going to make them grow tall and flourish.
And he'd bring self-righteous and the powerful to their knees.

And that's what Jesus SAID was His purpose in coming.
In Luke 19:10 He told us "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

And again in Mark 2:17 He said "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Or as Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 1:15 "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners— of whom I am the worst."

Everything in the birth of Christ was meticulously designed to declare that Jesus didn't come to impress the mighty and the powerful and the self-righteous. Jesus came to lift up the fallen, heal the sick and save the lost.

That's why Jesus was born in an insignificant village.
That's why He was born in a lowly barn & laid in a feeding trough.
That's why when the angels announced His birth they didn't go to Jerusalem or Athens or Rome and put on a display before the rich and mighty.

As someone said in a poem:

"I am so glad He was not born in some rich palace bed.
I am so glad to know it was a lowly place, instead,
A place where soft-eyed cows and sheep were sheltered and were fed.
For to the country-born of earth a stable will ever be
A wholesome place, where night comes down with its tranquility.
A place of heart's ease and content for all who choose to see,
And so - I like to think of Him, first opening His eyes
In that good elemental place beneath the friendly skies
That the men of fields could find Him there as well as the great and wise.
(*"I Am So Glad"* - Grace Noel Crowell)

But there's more.

Notice what Ezekiel says this Messiah had come to do
"On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches. All the trees of the field will know that I the LORD bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it."
Ezekiel 17:23-24

Notice what Jesus came to do

1. To give us shelter.
2. To lift us up – make us grow tall.
3. Refresh us as dry tree would be made to flourish.

This is the heart of the GIFT that God gave us on Christmas.

You see, Jesus didn't come so we could have beautiful trees decorated with tinsel and garland. And He didn't come so we could buy one another presents wrapped in pretty paper. He didn't come so Santa could come down the chimney and have

some cookies and milk. He didn't come so we could have Black Fridays and discounted Internet sales. He didn't come so we could have Hallmark films and Christmas parades.

I mean... those things are nice and all that.
But that's NOT why Jesus came.

Jesus came for one basic reason - to change your life and mine.
To LIFT US UP out of our guilt and shame.
To REFRESH us by satisfying our desire to be made right with God.
.And to SHELTER US from the accusations of our past.

Someone once put it this way:
"If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator.
If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist.
If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist.
But since our greatest need was forgiveness, God sent us a Savior."

One man put together what this gift was all about (Howard Thurmond in "Parables Etc.")

He descended that we might ascend (John 6:38, 14:3).
He became poor that we might become rich (II Cor. 8:9, Jas. 2:5).
He was born that we might be born again (John 1:14, 3:2,7).
He became a servant that we might become sons (Phil. 2:7; Gal. 4:6,7).
He had no home that we might have a home in heaven (Matt. 8:20; John 14:2).
He was hungry that we might be fed (Matt. 4:2; John 6:50).
He was thirsty that we might be satisfied (John 19:26).
He was stripped that we might be clothed (Matt. 27:28; Gal. 3:27).
He was forsaken that we might not be forsaken (Matt. 27:26; 28:20).
He was sad that we might become glad (Isa. 53:3; Phil. 4:4).
He was bound that we might go free (Matt. 27:2; John 8:32-36).
He was made sin that we might be made righteous (I Cor. 5:21).
He died that we might live (John 5:24, 25).
He came down that we might be caught up (I Thess. 4:16, 17).

One last thought.

At the beginning of this sermon I suggested that God didn't spend much on HIS gift when He gave Jesus to us.

Of course, you KNOW that's not true.

Repeat with me: "For God so loved the world that He gave His ONLY begotten Son, that whosoever should believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

That cost God His ONLY begotten Son.

And Philippians tells us a little more about what it cost:

“(Jesus) being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! Philippians 2:6-8

It cost Jesus to come down to the manger in Bethlehem.

He made Himself nothing.

The King of Heaven became a servant.

He’d been robed in majesty, but He stripped Himself of His Godhood and became a man.

And ultimately He allowed Himself to be humiliated and to suffer as He died on the cross for our sins.

CLOSE: There are people who don’t want Christmas celebrated. There are godless folks who continually trying to shut out the manger and all it stands for. These people know what Christmas is all about so they even hate the word “Christmas” because they realize in it’s very declaration it tells us that this season is about Christ. And they have progressively succeeded in removing Christ from public venues and from schools and public land.

But there is one place we dare not let them succeed.

We dare not allow them to stop us from sharing about Jesus.

We dare not let them stop us telling about the birth of Christ.

We dare not allow them to cow us into silence.

His birth part of our witness.

It is in the birth of the Christ child that people get introduced to the kind of God we serve and we must never allow anyone to shut us down in proclaiming even the story of His birth.

ILLUS: Gene Dulin was a missionary to Europe and told of standing in front of a store front in Austria, looking at a hand carved nativity scene. The figures were a bit larger than life and it was one of the most beautiful nativities he’d ever seen.

As he stood there thinking about the meaning of the nativity, a grandmother stopped with her 3 year old grandchild. She stooped over and began talking with the child. She pointed to Mary, then to Joseph, and to the baby.

Dulin said he couldn't understand her language but he knew she was telling the story of Jesus to her grandchild.

Then Dulin added, “For 2000 years parents and grandparents have passed on the story of Jesus. It has changed millions of lives and the whole world.

That's the gift of the baby.”

It is THAT message that we bring to the world.

The message of a child who was given to lift us up in a world that would often tear us down.

Of a child who was sent to restore us in a world that would suck us dry.

And a child who would give us shelter in a harsh and cruel world.

Have you made that message part of your life?

If not, we offer this invitation for you to come forward and allow Jesus to change your life too.