

**Sermon Christmas Day, Yr. B @ St Johns – 25/12/20**  
**“The gift of the joy and presence of Christ” (Luke 2:8-20; John 1:12-14)**  
**- Pastor André Meyer**

Pray: Father, bless our time today as we hear your Word through your Son, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

So, who’s received their gifts last night or this morning? 😊 Did you get the gift/s you expected? I did! 😊 Did you get what you wanted? I did! 😊 It’s easy when you buy a gift for yourself! Did any of you get a surprise? Here’s a tricky one: Did any of you get something you didn’t really want? (Let’s not open that can of worms!) Any tantrums as yet, *children*? I’m talking about with *your parents*! 😊 (...Don’t worry, there’s plenty of the day still left!)

Some gifts give us great deal of happiness don’t they? And our happiness lasts at least for *the whole year* until next Christmas, doesn’t it? Well, *at least* for a few months... the rest of December? Perhaps until Boxing Day?? Well, I hope the happiness you get from your gift gives you a sense of happiness *today* in the very least! 😊 That ‘happiness,’ is a momentary feeling of emotion that someone cares for you enough to give you something special... It’s a nice feeling at least for a short time. Even the *best gift* is only ‘great’ if it’s something we might need or want, and it gives us a good feeling that might last for a little while longer. Although, it may surprise us that many of the gifts we give or receive *won’t result* in a happiness that is as long lasting as we hope... Unless, it’s a gift that keeps on giving – like something edible, drinkable or sweet that after we enjoy it, we *literally* ‘carry’ it *with us*... so we can work it off in January! Now, that’s a gift that *keeps on* giving! 😊

At Christmas, we may not always get what we expect, or want... like the whole of 2020! We haven’t gotten what we expected out of the year, have we? For many, this Christmas is tinged with sadness at not being able to share it with love ones, particularly after all the restrictions this year. Take heart, God will see you through.

Today, we hear the Gospel message proclaimed by the angel to the shepherds out in the fields near Bethlehem, “*Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people...*” (Lk 2:10). At an unexpected time, as they were going about their work, they received a gift. A gift of Good News to give them ‘great joy.’ In fact, joy not only for them, but for *all* God’s people. Compared to happiness, joy is a much deeper and longer lasting emotion. Joy transcends the feelings of happiness. It is something much more sustaining, that lives within us. It means we can know joy even though we might not be feeling all that happy. The angel proclaimed Good News of *great joy*: the birth of Jesus, the Christ. “*Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord*” (v.11).

After the angelic choir’s glorious performance praising God for His gift, the shepherds hurried off to find the baby in the manger. When they found Him, they

were amazed. After receiving the Christ simply as He was, as an infant child, they left with *more* than happiness; they left with a sense of *joy* and wonder. And, as a result, they spread the word to *everyone* about what they'd seen. They felt a great, inner joy, that no one could take away from them. All who heard the news were amazed at what the shepherds said (Lk. 2:14-18).

The shepherds knew that a new day had dawned in the birth of the Saviour. Christ was the long-awaited and promised gift not only given to them, but to *all* of God's people – of all races, creeds, cultures and generations – God's Christmas present to humanity. [Pause]

Although, the joy and peace the shepherds felt may, at times, seem foreign to us. Christmas may seem a little 'routine.' It may be tinged with sadness at the absence of loved ones or friends. Family traditions can seem empty or not as 'joy-filled' as they once were. Somehow, we've 'grown up' to discover the harsh realities of living in this world of sin. We've known grief and brokenness; hurting ourselves and others along the way. We understand failure and disappointment all too well. Yet, we try to hold on to our child-like feelings of happiness that we once knew. We try to manufacture joy, but we never get there. We fill ourselves with gifts, food, family time and fun, but when the excitement is over, we are simply exhausted.

This is why we need to rediscover the joy and wonder of *God's* precious gift He has given, and the peace His Son has come to bring. The shepherds had a sense of this as they worshipped God for all they'd seen. Little did they know of exactly *how* amazing God's gift in the manger would be. Little did they know of *how* He would suffer and die on a cross. His task was to be a sacrifice for the sin of the world. 'This is the way' God chose to make His peace with us, giving up His Son unto death, so we could know peace and joy with God, not momentarily, *but forever!*

Jesus is the gift we receive by faith, the gift that keeps on giving long after all other gifts have lost their shine, their excitement and interest. *He* is the gift that does not leave us, run out of batteries, or fail when it matters most. With Jesus, we look to the future with joy and hopefulness – *even* to next year – simply because of His promise to be with us and grant what we need along the way.

With Jesus our Saviour, we can put aside or hand over to Him every weight that burdens us. We can leave behind the disappointments of the past. We can confess and let go of the sin we have held onto for so long. We can bring our daily frustrations to Him. And, He gives us His peace from the cross, "*It is finished... Your sins I will remember no more*" (Jn. 19:30; Hebr. 8:12). Jesus is the gift of God's love, who, for our sake, became the unwanted gift, dying for our sins, so we would not be separated from God.

As we receive Christ, God in human flesh, by faith, He comes to dwell in us – but not simply to make us happy. He has come to dwell in your heart – to give you the deep joy of His presence, which is available whenever you need. He’s come to transform our mess and make us holy. He’s not afraid of our mistakes, our burdens, or our sin. He doesn’t come to judge or condemn. Instead, He comes to bring His comfort and peace. He comes to light the way in our darkness, and to make a way where there was none before. He comes to find us where we are lost and alone, so that we *may be found in Him*. He comes to give hope and a future that no one, not even 2020, can take away – not even death. Death will only open the door to a greater joy and peace than ever before!

Jesus, God’s Son, the babe given to dwell in the manger of our hearts, *is* the present God graciously gives us today. He is the gift long-promised that didn’t disappoint. He is the Light of all lights, the hope of all humankind, the Saviour from sin, our Master, our King, yet our personal brother and friend. Jesus gave a human face to Almighty God – like Father, like Son – so we can know God is real, unlike an old man in a red suit.

It’s been a tumultuous year, so, simply enjoy the pleasures and blessings God gives you this day – the pleasures of giving and receiving love, spending time with those around you, or peacefully by yourselves. Enjoy the simple gift of God’s Son, born to make you new. The gifts we give are mere shadows of God’s greatest gift of joy in the birth of Christ. Though, our season of giving may end, God’s giving *to us* never will. Jesus is the gift that *keeps on giving*. ...Through His Son, our Heavenly Father gifts us His *very best*; He gives us *His heart*, that we may simply receive Jesus our Saviour and Lord, and give Him our heart and our lives, in return. Amen.