

# The Heart of Christmas

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[ 0 : 00 ] One of the traditions that we've had in my family growing up is to hear my dad read Luke chapter 2 verses 1 through 20 for us.

And so I'm blessed to have my parents with us tonight, and I asked my dad if he would bless us all tonight by reading that passage of Scripture to us. So, here you go, Dad.

Well, thank you. Hi, everybody. I'm the other Mike Scravani, the original model. This, of course, is the new and improved model.

Just ask his mother. Well, we thank you for having us here tonight. This is a beautiful church, and we thank you for taking such good care of Michael and Danny and Jack and Hazel, and it's great to be here.

So, once again, from the Gospel of Luke. Give me a second here.

[ 1 : 21 ] In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Cranerius was governor of Syria.

And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David.

And so he registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.

And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

And in that same region, there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.

[ 2 : 34 ] And they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you.

You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace among them, with whom he is well pleased.

When the angels went away from this, they returned to heaven. And the shepherds said to one another, Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known this by saying, Here is the child.

[ 4 : 11 ] And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds had said to them. But Mary pondered all these things in her heart.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying, praising God for all that they heard and seen.

For it was just as it had been told to them. And I've heard that. And I believe it.

Praise the Lord. One thing you can count on the day after Christmas, I think, is long lines in the customer service area of stores with people looking to return or exchange a gift that they received on Christmas.

And when I look at those lines, I sense a lot of disappointment. Something went wrong. Something didn't fit right.

[ 5 : 26 ] Or the receiver just, you know, maybe didn't really like whatever it was that they received or were given. That's happened to all of us, hasn't it?

We've either received a gift that we faked to be excited about. Or we've given a gift that we knew the person who received it by their reaction just wasn't really that thrilled with what we got them. Then there are those gifts that, you know, you received them and you were excited about them. But over time, the excitement just diminished and eventually you packed that thing up or maybe sold it in a garage sale.

It just didn't have as much value to you as it once did. And I don't mean to be cliché, but Christmas reminds us that in Christ, Christmas reminds us of God's gift to us.

Jesus said in John 3.16, For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

[ 6 : 45 ] The Apostle Paul describes the depths to which God lowered himself in order to give us this gift. He says in 2 Corinthians 8.9, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

In other words, this gift comes to us at a great price. Christmas reminds us of God's grace.

What we could never do for ourselves or get on our own. 1 Peter 3.18 says, For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

This was all so that we might have God as our supreme, all-satisfying gift and treasure. At the heart of Christmas is God giving God.

For the enjoyment of his people whom he saves by giving his Son to suffer. So that by faith in him, we receive the gift of eternal life.

[ 8 : 32 ] A couple years ago, a poem was written by a man named Brian Hart. It's a little lengthy, but man, it's something I love.

And I think I've read it a couple of Christmas ago. I want to read it again because it's just wonderful.

And I hope that it will be a blessing to you as we begin to close our time together.

It's called The Gift. And again, it's written by Brian Hart. Come all ye burdened, lowly and blind.

Come all who are lost, that is all mankind.

To me who took eyes that I might you find, was ever a gift like mine. Who else but the author of life itself would descend from the heavenly shelf?

Into this tale I have written myself, was ever a gift like mine. Of love and logos and philosophy, the sages dreamt, though only hazily, but now at last can all be seen in me, was ever a gift like mine.

[ 9 : 38 ] Becoming low by humiliation secures a more splendid transformation. The lowest I'll raise in exaltation, was ever a gift like mine. O Eve, who heeded what the serpent said, the shame for commencing sin's crimson thread can end.

Your seed has come to crush his head, was ever a gift like mine. From Eden did the angels Adam send, but now to his offspring they do commend me, the new Adam, who will the world mend, was ever a gift like mine.

In Abraham all nations will be blessed, but how? Accomplishing it is my quest. I come to dress them in my righteousness, was ever a gift like mine.

An ancient stump sends up a royal shoot, a king to whom all kings will pay tribute. But greater is the prize that I'll impute, was ever a gift like mine.

From Bethlehem that king would come, was said, but I'll be more, their only house of bread, and give my body that all may be fed, was ever a gift like mine.

[ 10 : 58 ] Do not ignore my genealogies. Zachariah spoke of coming sunrise from God on high to darkened souls supplies.

My light that mortals I'll immortalize was ever a gift like mine. Elizabeth carries within her womb one to straighten my way, a voice from whom disciples will learn of the true bridegroom was ever a gift like mine.

A manger contains my body from cold. The very one who does the cosmos hold. The glories of Christmas are manifold.

Was ever a gift like mine. Begotten, not made, yet born of virgin. Still a stranger mystery I illumine. How sinners are made into God's kinsmen.

Was ever a gift like mine. The shepherds here first, for to them I am inaugurating my divine program, in which the chief shepherd becomes a lamb.

[ 12 : 25 ] Was ever a gift like mine. Mary's heart is my childhood treasury. Alas, a sword will bring it injury. Fear not, I'll heal it.

In my victory was ever a gift like mine. Simeon pines that for which many sought, opens his hands, receive what can't be bought.

My grace is never earned, but only caught. Was ever a gift like mine. The magi seek me via a shining star, meet a heavenly sun brighter by far, than all other treasure, one without par.

Was ever a gift like mine. Herod from his throne rules my land with might, but finds in my infancy cause for fright.

Why? Since his sins I have come to make white. Was ever a gift like mine. My parents to Egypt with me fly. So as Israel I identify, that their wanderings I might rectify.

[ 13 : 35 ] Was ever a gift like mine. Not only 30 years I'll be a man. My flesh is permanent, so that I can be advocate for an eternal span.

Was ever a gift like mine. With sufferers I come to sympathize, to take their pain, and with them agonize. In me their high priest they'll soon recognize.

Was ever a gift like mine. Is this not why I've come? I'm born to die. As ransom for many. Their souls I'll buy.

That all wretchedness I might beautify. Was ever a gift like mine. The tree of life I made for man's good. The cross of death man made, not knowing I would.

As a carpenter's son, trade wood for wood. Was ever a gift like mine. So as angels sing celestial chorus, Emmanuel will be the most joyous.

[ 14 : 42 ] Carol men will ever sing. God with us. Never was a gift like mine. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your son Jesus Christ.

Lord, we thank you for the good news of the gospel. That in Christ there is hope. That in Christ there is light. That in Christ there is life. Lord, I pray that as we in a little while go from this place, the promise of who you are, the songs that we've sung, the scripture that we've read, that Lord, you would just cause that to continually be present in our minds as we spend time with friends and family tonight and tomorrow.

That we would pause and just give you thanks for the many ways that you've blessed us. For the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. Thank you, Lord, for sending your son.

Thank you, Lord, for your willingness to die on the cross in our place for our sins that by faith in you, Lord, we're saved. We're clothed in your righteousness.

We receive the gift of eternal life. What a wonderful thing. And God, we give you the praise and the glory for it. In Jesus' name we pray.

[ 16 : 15 ] Amen.