

The Christmas Present  
A Sermon for Christmas Eve, 2017  
Luke 2:11-12  
[Lansdowne UMC](#)

What is the worst Christmas present you've ever gotten?

When I was a little boy, I thought that pretty much every Christmas gift that wasn't a video game or at least a toy was the worst Christmas present I'd ever gotten. To shirts, I'd say "Why?" To socks? "Are you kidding me?" To a book? Well, it could be worse... (It could have been socks).

What about you? Have you ever gotten a really bad Christmas present? Perhaps an unsolicited dieting book, or a gym membership, implying that, well, you know. A vacuum, because apparently your place is a pigsty? Dandruff shampoo?

Have you ever gotten a gift like that? If so I wonder if you were able to receive it. It seems to me that there are only a few options when it comes to a gift like that. You can take offense to the gift and reject it outright. Or else you can swallow your pride, and recognize that you are indeed an imperfect person who needs what is being given.

But isn't this the very type of gift that we are given on Christmas? Of course I'm not talking about the types of gift that are under the tree in the morning. I'm talking about the reason-for-the-season type of gift. Remember what the angel said to the shepherds? "I am bringing you

good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior.”

Can you hear the objections? “A Savior? What are you saying about me? That I can’t take care of myself? That I need saving?” Well, thanks for asking. Yes, that is exactly what Christmas is saying.

In fact, that’s what the angel is saying. Putting aside the stereotypical image of an angel as haloed, winged, person in a white robe, an angel is first and foremost a messenger from God. And so when the angel speaks, it’s a message from God. And this is God’s message: to you, a savior has been born. The angel isn’t saying, “Hey, just FYI, there is a savior available if you need one.” Nope. This is the message, “*your* savior has been born.” If you didn’t know that you needed one, the angel is telling you now.

Christmas tells us that we are completely lost apart from God’s intervention. It tells us we will not be able to pull ourselves together and live the way we need to. It tells us that God is unimpressed with our methods of rationalization. It tells us that the situation is so bad that it requires God becoming human to save us.

Some gifts are harder to receive than others. In Jesus we see the most generous gift imaginable-- God with us. At the same time, Jesus is a hard gift for some people to receive, because receiving him means sitting down to the Christmas dinner table and digging into a big ole’ piece of humble pie. And it’s hard to swallow.

Rich or poor. Young or old. Male or female. You need a savior. I need a savior. If you've never set foot in a church before, you need a savior. If you've been here for 90 years-- you need a savior. Christmas picks us up, turns us upside down, and shakes us until our pride falls out.

If we admit that we need a savior, perhaps we start to imagine what that savior could look like. Perhaps he'll be muscled and invincible like superman. Or maybe he'll defend us with a sweet shield like Captain America.

But of course, the angel quickly disappoints us. The angel says "and this will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." In other words, when you see a newborn baby that's taking a snooze in a feeding trough, you've seen your savior.

A Marvel superhero savior is apparently not on offer here. You want a tough guy? Too bad, you've got a baby. The gift becomes even harder to receive. This isn't the gift we expect. We couldn't have dreamed it up. It might not even be the gift we want. But it *is* the gift that we need.

Because this is the shocking reality: In this baby Jesus, God has taken on human form to save you and me. The Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen, has become not just a human, but the most vulnerable type of human there is: a new born baby.

God-in-the-flesh has to be nursed by his mother. He needs to have his diapers changed. He's got to be swaddled so he won't get too cold. And worst of all, he's incredibly, utterly, mortal-- which means killable.

This is why Christmas blows my mind, and I hope it does yours as well: Jesus is God made vulnerable. And yet that is how God chose to do it. Why?

I'm sure there are lots of really good reasons, but consider this one. If you've ever had a relationship of any depth-- whether a friendship or a love relationship, you know that close relationships require vulnerability. Close relationships only happen when the possibility exists that someone could get hurt. Without that vulnerability, the relationship can be warm and pleasant, but ultimately it's shallow. It's only when we risk getting our feelings hurt, risk being let down, that we experience a relationship with any depth.

The shocking claim of Christmas is that God has chosen to become vulnerable because God wants to have a deep, meaningful relationship with you. You're so valuable to God that God chose to become vulnerable for you. God doesn't sit far off in heaven stroking his gray beard. God comes down. He puts himself in position where we can harm him. Break his heart. Kill him, even.

And of course that is exactly what happened. 1 Peter 2:24 says it this way: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross."

The savior has been born. And his saving work will lead him to nail your sins and mine to the cross. The saving work begins at Christmas, but it ends at the cross. The two are inseparable.

So what about you? What will you do about the gift of Christmas? Is it the worst gift you've ever gotten? Do you take offense to the gift and

reject it outright? Or do you swallow your pride, and recognize that you are indeed an imperfect person who needs what is being given? Humility is the only way to receive the gift of Jesus. But he's the gift you need the most.

So this Christmas may you have the humility to receive him. May you recognize anew the absurd lengths that the Son of God will go to to bring you into relationship with God. And most of all, may you hear the angel's words as spoken to you: "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."