

What does Christmas bring?

Christmas Brings Hope

Part 1

Intro: With Christmas being 18 days away, it can bring up a host of emotions in people. Joy, wonder, excitement, anticipation. But for others there is stress, anxiety, despair, feeling overwhelmed, even sadness. Despite all the emotions Christmas can create, there is one thing God wants everyone to experience this Christmas. What is it? It is HOPE.

As we look at the beginning stages of the Christmas story, it creates hope that something amazing is coming. God sees the plight of His people and He has a plan for changing everything.

- The story begins in Luke 1 – Not with Mary and Joseph, but with a priest called Zachariah, his wife Elizabeth and the birth of John the Baptist.
- Every story happens in a historical context. Even the Christmas story took place during a very unique time in history. In the 1st century Israel under Roman control – explain
- Israel was under Roman rule and influence from 63BC to 135AD. That's just short of 200 years! By the time John the Baptist and Jesus were born, Israel had already endured 63 years of being under Roman control.
- Rome brought roads – technology such as aqueducts, bath houses, public sanitation. They built new cities inside Israel. This also meant the Jews were heavily taxed to pay for all this. Rome also ruled with an iron hand. They were brutal in their control of the population. Life for the Jews was hard.
- Rome also brought a wide array of gods to worship which was highly offensive to the Jews.
- The Jews were allowed to worship God. Their King, Herod the Great – had built a massive temple complex that rivaled anything in the ancient world. It could hold over 200,000 people at one time. BUT...Herod the Great was as ruthless as Rome.
- It is this backdrop that the Christmas story takes place.
- Summarize story in Luke 1 – The story begins with a priest – his wife and a once in a lifetime opportunity to serve at the temple. - Explain

How does this story and Christmas bring hope?

1. God sees our need

Luke 1:13 “But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.” (NLT)

- God knew their greatest hurt (Being childless)
 - Who knows how many decades he prayed for his wife to have a child. I’m sure by now they had given up hope for that prayer to ever be answered. My guess is he had stopped praying for a child. His wife had passed that window of opportunity.
 - His response to the angel indicates this. He couldn’t see how it was possible. Basically...we’re too old.
 - Being childless brought shame in that culture. It brought questions why God hadn’t allowed a priest to have children. It brought hopelessness. What had they done wrong? Why didn’t God bless them? But God saw all of it. The angel said; “Your prayers have been heard.” God sees you! HOPE

Why does this matter?

- God sees you
 - This story reminds us that God sees our pain, our discouragement, our despair, our stress, our anxiety, our grief, our loss, our overwhelming circumstances. God sees our heart, He sees our loneliness, He sees our wounds. He sees it all and He cares.
 - I know there are times we wonder if God sees and cares about our lives. I know I have gone through seasons where I’ve questioned this at times. God, are you there? Do you care what I’m going through? Do you see how my heart is broken? Do you care about the pain I feel? Do you see and care about my personal life?
 - It’s easy for us to draw the conclusion that God doesn’t care about our pain or despair when we have circumstances that are difficult. Especially, if those circumstances are ongoing.
 - Isn’t this the age old question? If God is so good and so powerful, why does He allow so much pain and suffering in this world? Yet, the bible really isn’t that concerned with answering that question. It just shows us how God invades the pain and brokenness of this life.
 - That’s the Christmas story. It reminds us that God does see – He does care – He does invade the darkness of our lives. If you wonder of God sees you today the answer is a resounding YES!

I Peter 5:7 “Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.” (NLT)

Ps. 103:13-14 “The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust.” (NLT)

- God sees you. That’s hope.

2. God always has a plan

Luke 1:14-17 “And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. ¹⁶And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, ¹⁷and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.” (ESV)

God's plan will always accomplish 3 things...

- God's plan will take care of your need
 - God wants us to experience Him as our provider: God provided Zechariah and Elizabeth with a son. They will be childless no more.
 - God wants to provide for you too. When we experience God as our provider, it reminds us that we don't have to do life alone. We don't have to always be enough. God wants us to depend on Him – ask of Him – rely on Him – need Him.
 - God is never irritated at our needs. It's our very need that allows us to experience God up close and personal. Seeing God meet our needs moves God from a religious activity to someone real and involved in my daily life.
 - When we start experiencing God like this we are forever changed.

- God's plan will take care of your heart

And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth

- God wants us to experience Him as our healer: God is going to heal their heart – remove their shame – fill them with joy and gladness. He is going to remove the trauma and disgrace of being childless.
- God wants to do the same for you. He doesn't want to simply provide for you, He wants to heal the broken pieces of your heart as well. God cares about your heart – your feelings – your joy – your fulfillment.
- Sometimes churches just don't talk about this. They present God only caring about our obedience. This makes God harsh and unrelatable. He's the one who created our hearts. Of course He cares about them.

Ez. 36:26 “And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.” (NLT) Pain can make our hearts hard – But God can change a heart that is hard. That's His plan for you.

- God's plan will advance His Kingdom narrative

¹⁶And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, ¹⁷and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah...

- God always has a bigger agenda. Yes, He was going to meet their need and heal their hearts, but also do something big. John was going to be the forerunner of the coming Messiah. He was going to prepare the way for Jesus.
- What God does in our lives He will always use for more than we can ever imagine. God always uses our lives for a greater influence than we ever thought possible. He will do the same for you.

God's plans for your life will do the very same things. He has plans to meet your needs, heal your heart and plans to use your life and experiences to advance His Kingdom narrative on earth.

Jer. 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." (NLT)

Eph. 2:10 "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (NLT)

- Even in your darkness, God still has a plan. Even in your circumstances, God still has purpose. Even in your failure, even in your hopelessness God still has a plan for your life that will meet your needs – heal your heart – and use your life giving you purpose.
- What does this do? It gives us hope.

3. Circumstances can't stop God

Luke 1:18 "And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." (NLT) It's physically impossible!

Luke 1:19 "Then the angel said, "I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news!" (NLT) This message comes from God. If He said it, then it will happen!

- Circumstances steal our hope

- Zechariah had lost hope of ever having a child. The circumstances made it impossible. He and his wife were old. The biological clock had run out. Why hope for something that is impossible?
- I love Gabriel's response. It's as if he's offended that Zechariah even points out the obvious circumstances. Because in Gabriel's mind, they are completely irrelevant. This message comes from God, therefore it is going to happen.
- Maybe you are facing some circumstances that are robbing you of hope today. Even though God hasn't sent you an angel with a message, He still wants to give you hope today. HOW?

- God specializes in the impossible

- The bible is filled with stories and examples of God showing up in impossible situations.

- Noah was saved by building a boat – Moses and Israel were saved because the Red Sea parted – David killed a giant with a rock – Daniel survived all night in the lion’s den – and the best one of all is Jesus didn’t stay in the grave. He has power even over death.
- This doesn’t mean He always removes our impossible situation with some type of dramatic miracle. Sometimes the miracle is for us – He changes the circumstances. Sometimes the miracle is in us. He empowers us and changes us despite the circumstances.
- He gives us strength beyond ourselves – fulfillment despite pain – joy in sorrow - endurance in weakness – hope when all around us is despair. These are the miracles He does in the human heart.
- If you feel like you’re facing some impossible situations today, God specializes in the impossible. He may change your circumstances, but I know He will

4. God fulfills what He promised

Luke 1:57-58 “Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son.”⁵⁸ And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.” (NLT) God came through on His promise

- Our hope is in the character of God

Num. 23:19 “God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?” (NLT)

- What God says happens. What God promises cannot be stopped, altered, blocked, forgotten or left unfulfilled.
- The Christmas story gives us hope because it is the fulfillment of what God promised at the beginning with Adam and Eve. Someone is coming who will make this right again.
- When sin entered the world – Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden – Intimacy with God was lost – we were introduced to our spiritual enemy – Satan...God gave us hope. Explain Gen 3

Gen. 3:15 “...he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” (NIV)

- Hope is coming. Someday I will send someone through the woman to crush the head of your enemy and make things right again. This is the Christmas story. It’s a story of hope fulfilled through Jesus – His sacrifice – and our relationship with Him.
- It’s so much more than a baby in a manger. It’s the fulfillment of a promise to rescue humanity from sin, restore our relationship with God and give us an eternity to look forward to.

- The bible is filled with promises to give us hope
 - For those of you who are new to this, the bible is a promises book not a rule book. It is filled with promises to give us hope. Why do promises from God give us hope? Because they are guarantees because they come from God. His word cannot fail!

Rom.15:4 "Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us. And the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled."
(NLT)

Maybe you're in need of hope today. Honestly, who isn't? Your hope isn't in wishing your circumstances change. The hope you can count on is in a person...and that person is Jesus. He is the God of Hope. He's a living hope.

Prayer: