



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

This message is the last in our series titled "Prepare Ye". As we went through the Advent season, this special series gave us time to Ponder, Pray, Praise and Proclaim the fact that Our God came to earth in human form to bring us salvation. So as we enter into this Holy Night remembering and celebrating the birth of Jesus in the lowly stable in Bethlehem, may we all open our hearts to God's love on earth.

A story is told about a wealthy man who, years ago, shared a passion for collecting art with his son. And folks I do apologize if you have heard this story or one similar to it before, but it is a great story for this special night. Well, the father along with his son, collected priceless works of art by Picasso, van Gogh and others. This art adorned the walls of their family estate. One year, war engulfed the nation, and the son left to serve his country. Soon his father received a telegram. His son had been killed in the line of battle. Distraught and lonely, the old man faced the upcoming Christmas with anguish and sadness.

On Christmas morning, a knock on the door awakened the depressed old man. As he opened the door, a soldier greeted him who was holding a package. The soldier said, "I was friends with your son. I have something to give you." The soldier mentioned that he was an artist and then gave the package to the man.

It was a portrait of the man's son. Overcome with emotion, the man hung the portrait over his fireplace, pushing aside millions of dollars worth of art.

The following spring, the old man died. The art world waited with anticipation for the day when his paintings would be auctioned off. According to the will drawn up by the old man, the art would be auctioned off on Christmas Day. Christmas Day finally arrived and art collectors from around the world gathered to bid on some of the world's most spectacular paintings.

The auction began with the painting of the man's son. The auctioneer asked for an opening bid, but the room was silent. "Who will open the bidding with \$10?" No one spoke. Finally someone said, "Who cares about that painting? It is just a picture of his son. Let's move on to the good stuff" The auctioneer responded, "No, we have to sell this one first. It is right here in the will. Now, who will take the son?" Finally, a neighbor of the old man offered \$10. The neighbor said, "I knew the boy and I'd like to have it." The auctioneer said, "Going once, going twice, sold". The gavel fell.

The auctioneer looked at the room filled with people and announced that the auction was over. Everyone was stunned. Someone spoke up and said, "What do you mean, it's over? We didn't come here for a painting of someone's son. There is millions of dollars worth of art here!" The auctioneer replied, "According to the man's will, whoever takes the son gets it all."

Whoever takes the son gets it all. That is the message of Luke 2. That is our message tonight. Whoever takes the son gets it all.

"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered." Luke 2:1 Caesar Augustus, Octavian was his given name at birth, allowed himself to be called "son of god" and while at his death the Roman Senate even decreed that he was a god. During his lifetime, Caesar Augustus was also called "savior". Rome revered him as the one who brought peace to the "entire world". The empire called his military exploits "the gospel".

Luke says, "not so!" In his nativity narrative in chapter two, Luke announced that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is also God the Son. Jesus is the Savior who

brings eternal peace to the entire universe. This is the only gospel that can save, deliver, rescue and restore us, forevermore!

Caesar Augustus was full of himself and so high and mighty that he wasn't concerned about taking the Son, the Son placed in, of all places, an animal's feeding trough in a backwater bungalow called Bethlehem! Truth be told, there is a Caesar in all of us.

And truth be told, there is an Adam and an Eve in all of us as well! Instead of taking the Son, like our first parents in Paradise, we stubbornly take the forbidden fruit. Then we take advantage of others. We take God's blessings for granted. We take vengeance upon those who hurt us. We take hold of our possessions. "Mine", we shout to the world. We take part in sin, oblivious to how it breaks God's heart. And we repeatedly take life into our own hands, singing Sinatra, "I did it my way!"

However, I am here to tell you that there is a better way! Take the Son! Whoever takes the Son gets it all. That is what Mary does. "She gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." Luke 2:7 "Inn", more specifically means "guest room". Mary and Joseph were guests in a home that was so overcrowded they were placed in a guest room, a room adjacent to the house that kept the family's livestock. That is why Jesus was placed in a feeding trough, what we today call a manger.

Christ is born in a guest room, that was more like a barn and Mary wraps him in bands of cloth and lays him in a manger. Where is the only other time in Luke's gospel where someone wraps Jesus in band of cloth and lays him down? That's right. When Joseph of Arimathea takes Jesus down from the cross, wraps him in strips of linen and lays him in his tomb. Can you see what Luke is doing? Christ's cradle points to his cross. Christ's manger points to his death on the cross!

On the other side of Good Friday, though Jesus lives! There was the cradle and there was the cross. But, conquering death, Jesus now wears the crown. That is why we have this sure and certain promise. Whoever takes the Son gets it all!

One day an elderly couple was at home and the husband said to his wife, "I'd like a dish of vanilla ice cream." The wife said, "I'd be happy to get that for you." Her husband asked, "Wait, shouldn't you write that down?" She said,

“Don’t be silly. I can remember a dish of vanilla ice cream.” “Yes, but I want chocolate fudge on it.” “Got it.” “And I want a cherry on top.” “Don’t worry.” And with that, she went into the kitchen. After a while, the husband thought he should check on his wife. He walked into the kitchen and there on the table was bacon and eggs. He said down and asked, “Where’s the toast?” Sounds too much like the Downing household!!!!!!

Well, God forgets too! God forgets and God forgives all of our sins, lock, stock and barrel! And why is that? Whoever takes the Son gets it all, all sin is forgiven and forgotten. A totally clean slate! And why is that?

“For unto you is born today in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:11 Caesar Augustus may be Rome’s savior, but Jesus is the Savior of the world. Caesar Augustus may be Rome’s king and lord, but Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

And Jesus is God’s gift for you “today”. Not that day or the next day or someday. Today! Luke frequently accents the nearness of God’s gift in Jesus. Luke 4:21 says, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Luke 5:26 proclaims, “We have seen extraordinary things today.” Luke 19:9 tells us that “Today salvation has come to this house. Luke 23:43 foresees the day for “Today you will be with me in paradise.” TODAY!

Mary takes the Son, today, so do the shepherds. “When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.’ “So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. The shepherds follow Mary, who also went with “haste” to see Elizabeth. That is because God’s glory, normally associated with the temple, appeared in a field full of sheep and shepherds! The high and mighty are brought down. The weak and lowly are lifted up.

And I invite you today, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to follow Mary, follow the shepherds and take the Son, either for the first, the fiftieth or five-hundredth time. And why do that?

Remember? Whoever takes the Son gets it all, every last bit of God’ mercy, grace and love that are packaged and delivered in this Christmas gift to us, “For unto you is born today in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” **AMEN**