



Introductions to the Lessons

The intro to the Service

Giving and receiving gifts at Christmas is special. There is no doubt about it. Children, especially, enjoy the excitement of asking for, and then waiting for, and then opening their gifts. But even we adults find a special joy in exchanging gifts at Christmas.

Tonight, we are going to hear about the greatest gift that has ever been given. I realize that is a rather bold claim. But it just happens to be true. And, you will want to pay close attention because this gift was given to YOU. As we read about this gift in the Bible tonight, we will discover more and more about it and it will become clear why this gift is the greatest ever given.

The intro to the first lesson (Genesis 3)

You know very well that some gifts are not particularly practical. They really aren't needed. Other gifts are so practical that people are offended by them. The gift we are learning about this evening was not just practical, it was absolutely necessary. You see, the first people God created—Adam and Eve—had thrown away their perfect, loving relationship with him by doing the very thing he commanded them not to do. By eating the forbidden fruit, they demonstrated that they did not trust their Maker. They thought they knew better than he. They wanted to do their own thing rather than his thing. This rebellion tore apart the fabric of their relationship with him. And, because they were now infected with sin, they would never be able to repair that tear. But, God could. And he promised he would. He would send someone who would restore a right relationship between God and his people.

Our first lesson begins with Adam hiding from God after he and Eve disobeyed. He was frightened . . . and had every right to be. But, in the final part of the lesson you will hear God promise to send someone to crush the head of the serpent, Satan, and save God's people. It was the very first promise of the greatest gift ever!

The intro the second lesson (Isaiah 11)

Some gifts make our lives easier (like a robotic vacuum), some gifts help us communicate (like a cell phone), some gifts are just plain fun (like an x-box). What would the greatest gift ever be like? The prophet Isaiah described the gift more than 700 years before the gift was opened. He

said that the gift would be a person full of wisdom and understanding. He would be a person who was perfectly just and fair. He would be righteous, meaning he would live a life that lined up exactly with God's will. And, he would one day bring about the restoration of a perfectly peaceful world—the world God had originally intended for his people.

The intro to the third lesson (Micah 5)

Some people like to find creative ways to give their gifts. For example, I know of one family that sets up an elaborate scavenger hunt for each child's birthday party. The birthday boy or girl must use the clues they are given to figure out where the next gift is. It can be a great deal of fun.

But God did not want us to be wandering around looking for the greatest gift. He didn't want us to miss it. So, throughout the Old Testament he had his prophets give details about this gift. In our next lesson, the prophet Micah predicted the exact place where the gift would be born—a small village just south of Jerusalem named Bethlehem. This is just one of more than three hundred specific prophecies about who the gift would be and what the gift would do. Add them all together and the result is unmistakable. We know Jesus is the fulfillment of all those prophecies because he is the only one who fulfilled all those prophecies.

Listen as well to what Micah says about the promised gift—two things in particular. He says that the Savior's origins were from ancient times. In other words, he existed before the world even began. And, he says that his greatness would reach to the ends of the earth. And it certainly has, hasn't it? In fact, we are celebrating his greatness here tonight, on the other side of the world from where he was born.

The intro to the fourth lesson (Luke 1:26-38)

Some gifts are more difficult to give than others. Some of you are old enough to remember *Cabbage Patch Dolls*. These dolls were so popular one year that they were nearly impossible to buy. They were all sold out. If you really wanted to give one to your child, you had to pay hundreds and hundreds of dollars to purchase one from someone second-hand.

The gift we are learning about tonight was not just difficult to give, it was impossible. You see, in order for God to rescue us from our sins he needed to become one of us. He needed to enter our world and take our place, be our substitute. But to do that, he had to be born in an impossible way. He had to become God and man in one person. So, God sent one of his angels to tell a young virgin named Mary that she was going to become pregnant miraculously, by God's power. We read about this remarkable announcement in our next lesson from the Gospel of Luke.

The intro to the fifth lesson (Matthew 1:18-25)

So, God had now revealed precisely where his gift would be born and precisely who would give birth to him. But he was not yet done sharing information about his gift. Once again, he sent an angel with a message, this time to Mary's fiancé named Joseph. Along with explaining why Joseph's fiancée was pregnant, the angel told Joseph two of the names by which he would be called—both names would reveal how special this gift really was. He would be called “Jesus” which means “Savior” or “Deliverer” because he would save us from our sins. And, he would be called “Immanuel” which means “God with us” because that is precisely who this gift would be—God in human flesh.

The intro to the sixth lesson (Luke 2:1-8)

The time had finally come. After waiting thousands of years, humanity was about to get a glimpse of the greatest gift ever given. So, where would the unveiling take place? On a stage in front of thousands of people while being broadcast to people around the world? No. Instead, God's greatest gift appeared in a lowly stable in a tiny town to an unremarkable couple. Let's listen to this remarkable event from Luke's Gospel.

The intro to the seventh lesson (Luke 2:8-20)

When you open a really, really exciting gift—something you desperately wanted or never thought you would receive—you cannot contain your excitement. (Here the lector may choose to insert a personal story of a strong reaction he had to a gift he was once given.) That's just the way it is with great gifts. So, it should come as no surprise that even the angels in heaven sang for joy when Jesus was born. And, it should come as no surprise that the shepherds who first saw the Savior could not contain themselves but told everyone what they had witnessed.

Like the angels, we are here tonight to sing for joy over God's great gift. May we, like the shepherds, eagerly and joyfully tell others all about it.