

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF CHRISTMAS

Matthew 1:21

By Andy Manning

The title of this sermon is “How to Get the Most out of Christmas.”

The week of Thanksgiving Lydia and I started brainstorming about how to get the most out of the Christmas season. We talked about putting up decorations and Christmas lights; we talked about playing Christmas music in the house; we talked about gifts and movies (there are certain movies I like to watch every year, such as *National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation* and *Home Alone*); we talked about driving around town to look at Christmas lights. We talked about getting together with family. We love Christmas time, and since it only comes around once a year, we want to make sure that we get the most out of Christmas.

But if you really want to make the most out of Christmas, then you don’t need the music, the decorations, the gifts, or the food. If you want to make the most out of Christmas, you really just need to **know** three things.

Turn with me to **Matthew 1:18-21 (CSB)**.

18 The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit. 19 So her husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.

20 But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

Today I just want to focus on the last verse in this passage. Matthew 1:21 tells you all that you need to know in order to make the most out of Christmas.

3 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CHRISTMAS

1. Know WHO Christmas is about.

If you were to try to figure out who Christmas is about from watching Christmas movies, you would probably conclude that Christmas is all about Santa Claus; or Christmas is all about children. But that's not true.

Or if you were to try to figure it out from watching commercials, you would conclude that Christmas is all about exchanging gifts, or it's about children – making their dreams come true. But that's not true.

Who is Christmas about?

Look at **verse 21**. “She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

Christmas is about the birth of Jesus Christ, God's only son.

Let's review some of the details of the Christmas story.

God sent the angel Gabriel to the virgin Mary that she would become pregnant by a miracle of the Holy Spirit and she would give birth to the Son of God, the Messiah.

When her fiancé discovered that she was pregnant, he decided to break off the wedding, but an angel appeared to him in a dream and told him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, because the baby was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and He would save His people from their sins.

About 9 months later, Caesar Augustus, the emperor of Rome, ordered that a census be taken of the entire empire, and so everyone had to travel to their ancestral homes to be registered.

This meant that Jesus' parents, Joseph and Mary, who was pregnant at the time, had to travel from the town of Nazareth, in northern Israel, down to Bethlehem, in the southern part of Israel, which was at least a three-day trip.

But when they arrived in Bethlehem there was no place for them to stay, so they had to sleep in a stable, or a barn, where the animals, live, and that's where Jesus was born – in a stable.

And since Jesus didn't have a crib, Mary laid him in a manger – the feeding trough of animals.

On the day Jesus was born, God sent an angel to tell the shepherds in the surrounding countryside the good news.

Luke 2:10-12 records the angels' words. "10 But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: 11 Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger."

So the shepherds hurried and found Mary and Joseph, and baby Jesus lying in the manger.

So who is Christmas about? It's not about Santa Claus; it's not about toys and gifts; it's not about Christmas trees; it's not about the lights and the decorations; it's not about Rudolph;

Christmas is about the birth of Jesus Christ, God's son.

This is why Christmas is also referred to as **Advent**, or the season of Advent. The word "advent" comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means coming. And so the advent season is the entire month of December when Christians are eagerly waiting for the celebration of Christ's birth, His first coming to earth.

Christmas is also referred to as the incarnation. The word incarnation means “in flesh.” And Christmas is called the incarnation because that’s when the Son of God, who existed for eternity past, came to earth and took on human flesh.

So Christmas is all about the birth of Jesus Christ, God’s Son.

Who is this Jesus that Christmas is all about?

- He is the Alpha and Omega; the beginning and ending of all things (Rev. 21:6).
- He is the Bread of life; the one essential food (Jn 6:35).
- He is the Chief Cornerstone; a sure foundation for life (Eph 2:20).
- He is the Chief Shepherd and the Good Shepherd; He gives us guidance and protection (1 Pet 5:4).
- He is Christ; the anointed One of God foreseen by Old Testament prophets (Mt 16:16).
- He is the firstborn from the dead; He leads us into resurrection (Col 1:18).
- He is the High Priest; our perfect mediator (Heb 3:1).
- He is the Holy one of God; perfect and sinless (Mk 1:24).
- He is Immanuel; God with us (Mt 1:23).
- He is King of kings and Lord of lords; the sovereign almighty (Rev 19:16).
- He is the Lamb of God; He offered His life as a sacrifice for our sins (Jn 1:29).
- He is the light of the world; he brings hope and gives guidance (Jn 9:5).
- He is our mediator; the redeemer who brings forgiven sinners into the presence of God (1 Tim 2:5).
- He is Savior; the One who delivers from sin (Jn 4:42).

My daughter told me that one of the new Christmas trends are **upside-down Christmas trees**. So I did some research and found that these have been around for about ten years. Places like Walmart and Target and Kohls sell Christmas trees that are meant to be placed upside down. Why? Some claim that it makes it easier to see the ornaments, because they hang away from the tree, and because it leaves more room on the floor for gifts (PICTURE). That’s one of the dumbest

things I've ever heard. An upside-down Christmas tree is not a Christmas tree. It's just goofy.

A lot of people have upside-down ideas about Christmas, too. They think Christmas is about Santa and presents and decorations and even romance. It's not about any of that. It's about the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2. Know WHY Jesus was born.

If you want to make the most out of Christmas, then you need to know why Jesus was born.

It's not enough to know that Christmas is about Jesus. You need to know why He was born. Why did Jesus leave heaven and come to earth? Why did the eternal Son of God take on human flesh?

Go back to **Matthew 1:21**. "She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Jesus came to save us from our sins.

The very name of Jesus means "The Lord saves," or "Yahweh saves."

Luke 19:10 says, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."

The book of Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus Christ,

showing that Jesus is a descendent of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and King David.

But one thing that's interesting is that four women are mentioned in the genealogy, and all of them are connected to shame or paganism.

Tamar (a prostitute), Rahab (a prostitute), Ruth (Gentile), and Bathsheba (an adulteress).

That the Messiah would come from women like this showed that Jesus came to condemn sinners; not to punish sinners; not to separate Himself from sinners; but to save sinners.

How did Christ save us from our sins? By dying on the cross.

Romans 5:8 says, “But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

When Christ died on the cross, His death saved us from our sins.

How did Christ’s death save us from sin?

To know the answer to that question, you have to understand **the consequences of sin.** (3)

First, sin prevents a relationship with God, but Jesus’ death reconciles us to God.

We were created to have a relationship with God; a friendship with God. But sin prevents that. Sin puts distance between us and God. It makes us enemies of God. We deserve to be punished. But when Jesus died, He took our punishment on Himself so that God can forgive us and we can be reconciled to God.

Romans 5:10 says, “For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.”

Second, sin leads to hell, but Jesus’ death provides eternal life.

The Bible is very clear that the punishment we deserve for our sins is hell, the place of eternal torment. But when Christ died on the cross, he paid the penalty we owed so that we could avoid hell and go to heaven when we die.

John 3:16 says, “For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”

Third, sin leads to suffering, but Christ’s death gives us abundant life.

Sin may feel good for a moment, but in the end it always leads to suffering.

It hurts our relationships; it destroys families; it destroys our bodies and minds; it steals our joy; it enslaves us by making us addicted to it. Sin leads to suffering.

But when we put our faith in Jesus, His Spirit comes inside of us and changes us, giving us the desire and the power to overcome sin and live for God. And so through Christ we can have an abundant, fulfilling life.

Jesus said in **John 10:10**, “A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.”

So if you want to get the most out of Christmas, you need to know **WHO** Christmas is about – it’s about the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. You need to know **WHY** Jesus was born – to save us from our sins. And there’s one more thing you need to know.

3. Know HOW to receive the salvation that Jesus came to provide.

Jesus came to save us from our sins, but many people miss out on this salvation.

Why? They don’t know HOW to receive salvation.

If you want to receive the salvation that Jesus came to bring, there’s something you need to. I can sum it up with the letters **ABC**.

A stands for Admit. In order to be saved you must admit that you are a sinner in need of a Savior. You must admit that you have broken God's laws.

Have you ever taken God's name in vain? If so, you are a blasphemer.

Have you ever stolen anything? If so, you're a thief.

Have you ever lied? Then you are a liar.

I'm not picking on you. We're all sinners.

But you can't receive salvation until you admit that you are sinner in need of a Savior.

Imagine that you are on a plane, a huge passenger jet, and someone comes to you with a big, bulky parachute and says, "I suggest you put this on." If you didn't think that the plane was in danger of crashing you would refuse. But if that person convinced you that the plane was about the crash, you would quickly put the parachute on.

If you don't see yourself as a sinner headed for eternity in hell, then putting on the parachute of Jesus Christ doesn't make sense. But if you come to believe and admit it, then you will be desperate to receive salvation.

B stands for believe. In order to receive salvation you must believe in Jesus as God's payment for your sin.

Believing is both positive and negative.

It is positive in that you are trusting in Jesus' death to pay for your sins and reconcile you to God.

But it is negative in that you are not trusting in your good works or good deeds to pay for your sins and reconcile you to God.

The Bible is very clear that we are saved by faith in Jesus, and not good works.

C stands for call. In order to receive salvation you must call on Jesus to save you.

Romans 10:13 says, “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

To be saved you need to pray and ask Jesus to come into your life to be your Savior and King.

And that’s how you receive the gift of salvation.

Until you admit, believe, and call on Jesus to save you, salvation is just an unopened gift that you’ll never enjoy.

CONCLUSION

An elderly man in Phoenix calls his son in New York and says, “I hate to ruin your day, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are divorcing – forty five years of misery is enough.”

“Pop, what are you talking about?” the son asks.

“We can’t stand the sight of each other any longer,” the old man says.

“We’re sick of each other, and I’m sick of talking about this, so you call your sister in Chicago and tell her.”

Frantic, the son calls his sister, who explodes on the phone. “Like heck they’re getting a divorce,” she shouts. “I’ll take care of this.”

“She calls Phoenix and screams at her father, “You are not getting divorced. Don’t do a single thing until I get there. I’m calling my brother back, and we’ll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don’t do a thing.”

The old man hangs up the phone and turns to his wife. “Ok,” he says. “They’re coming for Thanksgiving and paying there own fare. Now what do we do for Christ.”

That man and woman were willing to do just about anything to get their kids to come home for the holidays.

And God is the same way. God is willing to do anything to save you from your sins. He was willing to send His only Son, Jesus, to earth, to die a horrible death on a cross, in order to pay the penalty of your sins so that you can be forgiven, and reconciled to God, and receive eternal life.

But now the ball's in our court. God has done all He can do to save us. Now we have to open the gift. We have to receive salvation but admitting our need, believing in Christ's death, and calling on Him to be our Savior and King.

INVITATION

If you would like to call on Jesus to save you right now, then pray this prayer.

"Jesus, I know I am a sinner, and I want to turn from my sins and follow You. I believe that You died for my sins and rose again, and I accept You as my Savior and King. Come into my life, Lord Jesus, give me new life, and help me to follow and obey You from this day forward. Amen."