

The Rescue of Christmas

Pastor George Myers

Dismiss 3 & 4 year olds for Beginner's Church

If you are visiting family today for the Christmas holiday or if you are new here, welcome. I'm George, and I am the student ministries pastor. Pastor Brian is speaking tomorrow for our Christmas Eve services, so he has asked me to preach today. In the preaching world, this is sort of like resting your starters before the big playoff game. 😊 But I'm delighted to share the Word with you today.

Imagine this with me. You are sitting on the couch one evening reading a book when you hear a knock on the door. When you open it up, you see one of your closest friends. They're excited. They say, "Boy, do I have news for you! You won't believe what just happened!" What's your reaction? You want to know, don't you? Everybody loves to hear some news that they hadn't heard before.

Many of you want to be up to date on the latest news. We watch the news, we go to a news website, we read the newspaper. I was looking up information about cnn.com, the website for the news channel CNN, one of the most visited news websites in the world. About 510 million visitors came to their website last month, and about 175,000 websites link to cnn.com. Without a doubt, breaking news catches our attention.

But what if that news is old? Old news isn't as fun. What if I announced in the service that Pastor Tim had rich uncle he never knew that died and Pastor Tim was the grateful recipient of an inheritance of a million bucks? Okay, that's a pretty cool announcement! I am guessing that we would all be best friends with Pastor Tim after the service, wouldn't we? And what if I gave that same announcement tomorrow during our Christmas Eve service? We would think it was cool, but we now had a night to sleep on it. If I came up to you all next Sunday and said did you hear about Tim and the inheritance? Yeah, we heard. If I told you a fourth time, well, by that point, it's old news. Good for Tim. A million bucks. By this point, we have all seen him drag racing down Highway 13 in his new Lamborghini. After a while, even something pretty special has lost its luster. It's not new information.

Sometimes we hear the words "Christmas story" and it sounds a little stale. Some of you have been listening to Christmas music since late October, and if you are honest, if you hear "Jingle Bell Rock" one more time, you might lose it.

Many of you have heard the Christmas story before. Most of us have seen a manger scene in someone's front yard, been to a Christmas play, and sung a lot of Christmas carols. *We face a danger of letting Christmas traditions become mindless activities.* We are going to battle against this this morning; because we should recognize this – it's not just a story - **Christmas is God's daring, sacrificial, eternal rescue of mankind.**

So as we read this account of this rescue in Luke 2, work this thought in your mind – what I am about to read is amazing. Open your Bible to Luke 2 – if you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles underneath the chairs around you. As we read, be astonished at the miraculous going on. If this is something you have never read before, I am excited for you. This is good news for you. Know that this is for each one of us.

Luke 2:8-20 - And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Let's look at the facts of the story. What do you see here? What's amazing?

- In verse 9, the angel of the Lord appears to some shepherds – an ordinary occupation of some men who were working the monotonous night shift. In fact, I'm sure shepherds had spent countless nights doing exactly what these men were doing. Then an angel appears – something dramatically different is happening.
- Also, look again at the same verse - the glory of the Lord shines all around them – Perhaps you are like me, and when you have read this

before, your mind just reads this line rather quickly. Do you realize what this is – this glory of the Lord? This is the literally the presence of God, and it surrounds and encircles them in light. God is here. That’s amazing – and the shepherds are right in their response. Their response is in line with other stories of God’s presence in the Bible; God’s power is overwhelming and produces fear and respect.

- But then the angel speaks to the shepherds! He proclaims a world-altering message – good news for every single person – a Savior has come to rescue his creation from their sins. God in the flesh is here!
- You would think that a massive proclamation like that should be coming from a place of royalty or importance, right? But it’s a world-altering message signaled by a little baby, born in a barn in an insignificant town in a country that’s for centuries been ruled by other nations and empires.
- But the unimportant location doesn’t seem to dampen the overwhelming display of joy coming from heaven. Without warning, we go from one angel to angels everywhere. We’re talking thousands of angels. They are singing and worshipping God. What a display! Can you imagine? It must have been staggering to see. The angels are praising God because this news is amazing. The Messiah has arrived! God’s rescue is underway!
- As soon as the angels leave, what the shepherds have seen has compelled them to get to Bethlehem. There’s no hesitation to seek Jesus. The angel told them that Christ the Lord is in the next town over. On a dark night, leaving their sheep behind, they run to Bethlehem and find Mary and Joseph and the baby. Mary “treasures” these things. She finds this amazing.
- Do you notice that the shepherds are not shy to speak of the good news? They don’t minimize it. The shepherds go back to their jobs, praising God, because they realize it is amazing too.

Shouldn’t we take a clue from the angels, Mary, and the shepherds? Should we let this story grow stale to us?

This is remarkable, but your astonishment has to rise when you realize it was all predicted beforehand. There is nothing ordinary or lifeless about a rescue like this. Jesus fulfilled the prophecies. Jesus kept the promises.

Just the *facts* of the Luke 2 Christmas story are enough to be special, but the *results* from what happens from God’s rescue are amazing as well.

We need to realize that God’s rescue of mankind was an *eternal* rescue; however, we often have a different mindset when it comes to being rescued. We often look for temporary rescues. Do you know what I mean? For instance, my wife and I are parenting a 4 year old and a soon to be 2 year old. We love our kids. They are at an age where everything is exciting. If I say we are going to Wal-Mart, they get excited. If I say we are going to McDonald’s, they pretty much are backing the car out of the garage for me. Also, parenting is extremely hard. We desire to diligently teach our boys the wonderful truth of God’s word. Currently, they often diligently want to do whatever they feel like. Wouldn’t be great if doing what they wanted and what Jesus tells them to do would be the exact same thing? That would be awesome! There’s got to be a Bible verse about that somewhere, right? But those two things rarely overlap – as much as I would really want them to.

So you know what I find myself thinking? I find myself just thinking that I wish I had it easier – I find myself wanting a temporary rescue. If the kids would just not require as much parenting, then things would be so much better. Or, maybe it’s a different situation. What about when money starts to run low and there are still Christmas gifts to buy? There is no doubt that more money seems like the answer that God should give us. When we get sick, the solution that seems best to me would have to be instant healing, right? Here’s where that train of thought suffers - wishing, hoping, praying for an easy solution doesn’t necessarily mean a better life. It doesn’t. There is no doubt that God seriously cares about your life – he understands what you experience every day. Scripture is full of many prayers of God’s people that cry out to him about the troubles that are faced in life. God tells us that he will grow us, teach us, and mature us through the things he places in our lives so we will become more like him. And God does promise that he will supply us with everything necessary to live a life that brings honor and glory to himself. But God doesn’t tell us that he will always rescue us from those situations. It’s not in the Bible.

But there some amazing rescue stories in the Bible, George! Our teen Sunday school class last week discussed Daniel and the lions’ den. Some of you have heard that Bible story since you were 3! But when Daniel was thrown into that den, he was an old man – perhaps in his 70’s by that point. An amazing rescue like that didn’t change the fact that Daniel would soon die. So there has to be more to the story – and there is. That lion’s den story isn’t about Daniel; it’s about our amazing God who loves his children and will *sometimes* rescue us from physical harm, but he will always rescue his children from eternal harm.

So what do I need to want when faced with a long day of parenting? I don’t really need a bunch of easy days in a row to make up for it. What I really need is

to know God more and imitate his character. What I need is to ask God to teach me patience. I need God's strength to reflect his care and love to my boys. I need my faith to increase so I desire to teach my children the things of God even when I don't want to, don't feel like, and want to put my feet up.

What do I need when the bank account just doesn't have a whole lot left? Pray to God for him to provide for all your needs. Pray that God would give you wisdom and let you seek wisdom about how to live well financially. And pray that you would live a life through God's grace that would store up eternal treasures and not earthly ones. Rejoice that God is the one that provides security and comfort in this life, and that security and comfort does not come from a bank account that is overflowing. Pray that we would even still live generously - marveling that God *gave* his Son to us.

What do you need when your health is no longer a guarantee? Pray for healing, and healing soon, right? And then pray that you will trust God that he will provide you all the grace you need during your struggle. Then praise God that one day your new body that God will give you will never get sick again. Praise God one day there won't be any more hospital visits and medical bills. Praise God there will be no more haggling over health insurance. Then pray that you can use the suffering that you experience and share grace and hope to others who need to hear it. That kind of living is realizing God has given you an eternal rescue.

What happens when we live a life that is bent on temporary rescue? Well, the things of this world become elevated and are *the* priority. Living this life as smoothly as possible becomes the end-all because this life is all you have, and placing your hope in that is an idea that can't end well. The goal becomes less about knowing God and more about pleasing yourself.

What does it say in John 17:3? And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

But have you noticed in the world today, there seems to be a constant cycle of news focusing on what people are outraged by? Why does there seem to be so much malice, hatred, incivility, and name-calling that is often so public? Why is that? Could I suggest that the answer could be this – *we often greatly value what is right in front of us, and lose sight of what is really going to last.* We are striving to cling to the temporary things in life. We value deliverance from tough situations much more than we value what Christ has done for us.

God wants to teach us and grow us through the difficult yet temporary things we face in life because Jesus has eternally delivered us from the two things we could never save ourselves from – the bondage of our sins and the punishment for those sins – eternal death.

So if the eternal is what really matters, then what should we do?

Go run to Jesus. God is calling you to come and experience the grace of his eternal rescue. Repent of your sins, turn away from them, and follow after Jesus in believing faith that he alone can save you. In order to be saved from your sins, you can't erase them yourself. You need a Savior willing to rescue you from them.

A theologian from 11th century, Anselm, said it this way: "The debt was so great, that while man alone owed it, only God could pay it." So God paid it for you – through giving us His Son. So Jesus' birth happened so he could die.

Christmas is a great time to either realize or be reminded again that our biggest need has been met.

What this eternal rescue looks like is spelled out in Colossians.

Let me put some verses on the screen – Colossians 1:11-14.

May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Do you see what these verses are saying? Grab hold of God's strength ("be strengthened") so you can endure the hardships of this life. Use that strength to have patience and joy, even when we face difficult times.

Why? Why have joy when life seems to be so demanding? Well, look at that phrase in verse 12 – because *God has qualified you to receive the inheritance of the saints.* Oh, don't miss this - this so good. You know, we hear all the time from athletics, emails, telemarketers and junk mail the phrase "you qualify."

- Because of your great credit score, you qualify for a new credit card.
- Since you are one of our most valued customers, you qualify for a special discount.
- Since you are one of best employees, you qualify for a paid vacation.

- Because you're the top team in your conference, your team has qualified for the playoffs.

Somehow, *you* have earned the right to gain something special. But here, in these verses, *God* has qualified you. God did the work for you to receive the inheritance. God earned this, so that his children would receive the inheritance – the eternal rescue to rejoice with our God forever. That's astounding good news because I know me. I know my thoughts, my attitudes, how I speak, and lot of isn't good. I know I don't qualify to be with God. So God qualified me instead. That's how we can, with gratitude in our hearts, have joy when life is so demanding.

He did the work – you can see it in verse 13 – transferring us from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of the Son. This darkness is sin and evil. This is where we all have been. We have all sinned. We have all committed evil in our thoughts and our actions. But notice that despite the sin and evil that is prevalent in all of our hearts, God does not struggle to take us from darkness to the kingdom of Jesus.

There is no struggle to take the very worst repentant sinner into the kingdom of Jesus. Because of vs. 14 – we have been redeemed of our sins. We are forgiven. The Messiah has paid the debt.

Rejoice in the knowledge that if you know Jesus as your Savior, repenting of your sins & following after Him – you have been eternally rescued. Rejoice in the daring, sacrificial, eternal love of a God who pursued his wayward children by giving us a Son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Living life being a recipient of that kind of grace – an eternal rescue – demands a response. How do we respond to something so amazing like this? I believe that it has to be a response of gratitude. Grace from God births gratitude.

So to close our worship time today, I think it would be fitting to leave today singing together of what God has done and the joy he has brought to us by giving us his son. So as I close us in prayer, the band will come to lead us in song.

Prayer: The good news of a Savior – why it has changed everything. Our church is here because of it. In fact, we are meeting here today because of the good news. God, I pray that we never let eternal rescue that God offers become dull to us. I pray for those that face difficult times during Christmas – be good to our FBC family and remind us that you have qualified your children for an

inheritance that is incomparable – transferring us to the kingdom of your son, redeeming us of our sins, and giving us the joy of knowing you. Thank you, heavenly Father. You are always good. In Jesus name, Amen.

Joy to the World – the Lord has come.