

“The Christmas Gift”
By General Pastor Peter F. Paine
Sunday, December 14th, 2014

God bless you. You may be seated. I will tell you that I think this is the greatest Christmas gift I could ask for, is to be here.

So, I want to talk a little bit about Debbie. When I met her, in 1973, she had this beautiful, red hair. After we had been married for about twenty years, the red was leaving, and it was being replaced by something other than red, and so, she decided that she would dye her hair blonde. So, for the next eighteen years, I was married to a blonde. So, I got to marry a red-head in 1975, and that marriage lasted about twenty years, and then I was married to a blonde. About six months ago, she decided that she didn't want to be blonde anymore, and so now I'm married to a lady with what I like to call platinum-blond hair. It's kind of a glowing white. I'd like to introduce you to my third wife, Debbie.

I bring you greetings from the mother of our ministry, Sister Hazel Davis, and from the leadership in Norfolk. I'd like to talk about our children: Holly and Heather are doing great, and they both live in the Norfolk/Virginia beach area. We're very thankful for that; I know that they would like to be here with us, but, just, it wasn't possible. They were both in church in Norfolk this morning. Our son, Adam, still lives in New York City. He lives in the Bronx; he works in Manhattan, and he goes to school in Manhattan. He loves school, and he's embraced the city life of living in New York City. He feels very alive there. He loves school, and he tells us about it all the time. He'll be home in Norfolk for Christmas, so we'll be blessed to have all three of our children home for Christmas. Amen for that.

I understand you've been spending some time in the Gospel of Luke, chapter two, verses 10 and 11 this month. How many of you have received a blessing, with what you think about Christmas and what it means? Amen. I'm going to ask you a couple of questions, and I'm going to tell a couple of stories, and then I'm going to jump into Scripture. How many of you—be honest; show of hands—you've really got something that, “You know what? I'd like this for Christmas this year?” A lot of hands. How many of you, you don't want anything for Christmas; you'd just as soon not get anything? More moving hands. How many of you would really like to give something special this Christmas? You know what, if I could, this Christmas, I would give—you ever see something on television, or maybe on the internet, or news page, or wherever it is you might hear a story about someone who gave somebody a very special gift. Maybe it was—I saw one on the news the other day where there was this couple that went to the Cracker Barrel on a regular basis; they went there every Saturday. They were an elderly couple, and they noticed this really troubled vehicle—and they showed pictures of it on the news, and it reminded me of my first car. It had plastic on one of the windows, and, you know, duct tape to hold one of the fenders in place; you know the kind of car I'm talking about. They inquired, and found out who owned this car; it was a waitress that worked there. They decided that they wanted to do something about it, so they went and bought a new car, and brought it to the Cracker Barrel—of course, they paid for it—and they gave her the title and the keys. That was her tip that day.

Did you ever hear a story like that, and think, “Gee, if I could, I would give.” I want you to just take that, and let it soak in for a moment. “If I could, I would; if I could, I would give.” We're talking about the Gospel of Luke:

Luke 2:10-11 *And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour...*

A what? A savior. Think about what it is that God has given us.

Luke 2:11 *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.*

I said I was going to tell you a couple of stories; here's one: The year would have been 1964. I was ten years old, and I was saving to buy a bicycle. The reason I was saving to buy a bicycle: I had a paper route, and I delivered the morning paper. I grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; I delivered the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. I lived in a small neighborhood; there were seventy-five houses in the village I lived in, and I think I had about forty-five people on my route. So, I'd get up in the morning before school, and I'd deliver the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. It was a pretty quick and easy delivery route, and then I'd go to school. I was saving up because I wanted to buy a bicycle, and I was going to buy Ray Rosenbauer's bicycle, because—there were two sets of twin boys about the same age in our neighborhood: my twin brother Paul and I, and Ray and Russ Rosenbauer. Ray and Russ got new bicycles. They got new—and some of you are old enough to understand what I'm saying here—They got new Stingray bicycles, Schwinn Stingray bicycles... Now that roar, for you young people, from the old people that remember—anyhow, it was just a special bike at that time. It had a banana seat on it, and high handlebars, and a color called plum crazy, a beautiful purple metal-flake color. And Ray and Russ got brand new, Schwinn bicycles. It had a stick shift on the center bar; you know what I'm talking about, right? They were going to sell their old bicycles. I was saving to buy Ray Rosenbauer's bicycle, and Paul was saving to buy Russ's bicycle. To be honest, I don't remember whether he was getting Russ's or I was, but, either way, Paul and I were saving to buy Ray and Russ Rosenbauer's bicycles. My dad said to me one day—he was in my bedroom and he saw the jar with the money in it—and he said, "What are you saving for, Pete?" and I told him that I was going to buy this bicycle from Ray and Russ Rosenbauer. He asked, "Is that the bike you really want?" I said, "Nooo. The bike I really want..." and I opened the magazine—it was a Boy's Life magazine—and I said, "That's the bike I really want!" He said, "Aw, man. How would anybody be able to afford a bicycle like that?" I said, "I don't know, dad, but that's cool, isn't it?" So, if you haven't caught it, yet, I'm telling you about the most memorable gift from my childhood. So, I'm saving money, and my dad kept asking, "How you doing?" and I'd say, "I'm getting close, dad." He asked, "How many days do you have?" and I said, "I think by the end of the month I'll be able to do it." Ray and Russ were holding their bikes for Paul and I, because we had told them we wanted them. They were fine; they had their new Stingray bikes. Paul and I were safe. My dad said, "Pete, why don't you put a picture of that bicycle on your wall?" So, I ripped it out of the magazine, and I took a push-pin, and I put it on the wall. Every night, I looked at that bike. One day, my dad said to me, "How close are you to being able to buy one of the boys' bikes?" I said, "I think I'll get it this week-end, dad." Friday afternoon, my dad pulled into the driveway with his station wagon. He had two bags of groceries, one in each arm. He came in the house, and he said, "Peter and Paul, "Would you help me unload the station wagon? There's still some more stuff in it." Plum crazy and a strawberry red Stingray bicycles with a five-speed stick shift. I waxed that bike, and took good care of it. Paul and I could beat Russ and Ray up any hill. I still remember that bike, and I still remember the feeling of getting it. But, I think that my dad would remember—if he were still with us—he would remember the feeling of giving it. What would you like to get for Christmas? What would you like to give for Christmas?

I'm going to tell you another story; it happened the following year. Later on in the message, I hope these two stories will tie in with what the Lord has for us today. My dad and I were visiting my mother. She had had a cerebral hemorrhage—some of you have heard this part of my testimony—she was blind, and paralyzed and her memory was largely gone. She would have bright days when she could remember everything, and she'd have some days when she couldn't remember much of anything, and, on that day, she didn't remember that she had children. When I said, "Hi, mom, it's Peter," she said, "Peter who?" When they told her I was her son, she said, "I don't have a son Peter." So, in the station wagon, on the way back home, I was pouting. My father pulled the car off to the side of the road, and said, "What's up with you, son?" I told someone this story not too long ago. I said, "Well, mom doesn't

even know who I am, dad.” He said, “Just a minute, young man. Let me tell you something: For the first ten years of your life, you had the best mother any man could ever have. She poured her life and her love into you every single day, for the first ten years of your life. Then she got sick. Something happened, and it took her memory. Some days she knows us, and some days she doesn’t, but, I promise you, if you could open up her heart and see inside, you’d see your name written there. So, don’t you ever feel sorry for yourself, because she poured more love into you in the first ten years of your life than most young boys get from their mother in their whole lives. If I ever hear you feeling sorry for yourself again, it will be the last thing you say. Now, should I put this car in drive, and head on home, or should we sit here and talk for a little while longer?” I said, “Let’s go home, dad.” Those are the two stories I’ll come back to in a little bit.

The Apostle Paul is writing in First Corinthians, and in the twelfth chapter, he tells us that we are a body. He tells us that we need each other. He tells us that, without each other, we’re incomplete. Apostle Paul is writing to the Church in Corinth, and he says:

1 Corinthians 12:12 *For as the body is one, and hath many members...*

I would suggest to you today that you are a member of a body. That’s true in your natural family, and it’s true in your spiritual family. In case you don’t feel this, let me remind you that you are important to the body. That’s your natural family, and it’s your spiritual family. Some of you are hearing me say this, today, and you’re not particularly happy with your natural family right now. Maybe you feel that you really have something that you could complain about, and, you know what? you would be justified in your complaint. But, I want to ask you to remember today that it’s not about everyone else in your family for the moment; I want to talk to you about *you*. I want to talk to you about what you bring to the table in your family. Let the church say amen. Because, we all bring something different to the table. You ever been—show of hands—how many have ever gone to a pot-luck? You bring one thing, and everybody else brings one thing, and there’s a lot of things for us to enjoy at a pot-luck, right? I like pot-lucks. If you’re like me, when you go through a pot-luck, you get a little of this, and a little of that, and a little of this, and a little more of that, and a little of this... Everybody brings something. Most people bring something special to a pot-luck. You bring your very best dish, right? When Parrish talks about food, he lights up. I’ve stood close to Parrish when he talks about food; he sort of vibrates. See, in a family, we all bring something to the table. I want you to know today that you bring something to the table. You matter to your family. Maybe today is the day for me to tell you that, you know what? even if your family has brought empty pots to the pot-luck, it’s time for you to bring your special dish to your family. You say, “Wait, you don’t know my family’s story.” No, I don’t. No, I don’t. It may have been unfair of me to say that without sitting down with you first and hearing your family’s story, but let me tell you something—did you hear me say what my father said to me—let me tell you something: Your Heavenly Father knows your family’s story. Your Heavenly Father brought us a gift. He said, “...unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” If you’re writing down notes, write down 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. But, before I leave and go to the Prophet Isaiah, I want to remind you that chapter twelve starts with these words, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.” (1 Corinthians 12:1) So, when you spend time in that twelfth chapter of First Corinthians, remember that spiritual gifts matter. Remember that you have something to bring to the table. Just because somebody else has brought an empty pot to the table, and they filled their plate up, don’t you be guilty of following that example. It’s up to you, it’s up to me, it’s up to us to bring something to the table; to bring something to the Body of Christ.

So, let’s go to Isaiah, and see what he says about this gift that Christ is in our lives. I wish I had some more time this morning, because I would like to develop it a little bit about how rebellious Israel has been, about the challenges Israel was facing, about the problems that the Children of Israel had at the time

that this prophecy went forth. But, when things were bad, the Lord promised something good was about to happen. So, maybe I need to remind you, today, that if things are bad, there is a promise that something good is about to happen. Maybe I came today to remind you that even though things are bad, even though there may be a storm in your life, even though there may be challenges, and trials, and tribulations in your life, even though you may be suffering, and hurting, and I'm looking at you as you're looking at me, and I know some of you, this Christmas season, you're struggling to be happy for those that are talking about all this joy. You're struggling to be happy for those that are talking about all this peace. You hear of people who are getting new cars, or you hear some preacher stand up and tell you about how he got a new bicycle, and you think, "Yeah, I never got a new bike. I never got a new bike. I wasn't even in a position to save up to buy Ray Rosenbuer's old bike." I want you to know that I appreciate what predicament that is, but, in spite of that, could I be the one to remind you today that: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." You see, the Prophet Isaiah said to the people of Israel, "You suffered. Not everyone was rebellious, but everyone suffered." Sometimes we suffer for someone else's sin, don't we? Sometimes we're the victim. Then some do-gooder like me comes along and says, "Don't feel sorry for yourself," and you say, "You didn't get raped, you didn't get abandoned, you didn't get..." Huh? I didn't live your life; I didn't walk in your shoes. I get up here and I talk about how my dad bought me a brand new bike, and some of you find it hard to find any joy in that story, and I understand. But, I came to tell you today that unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

So, what did Isaiah say? well, if you're writing notes, write down Isaiah 9:1-7, but I'm going to jump in at verse five, and then highlight verse six.

Isaiah 9:5 *For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise...*

Sometimes that's where we're at in life. Sometimes that's where we're at when somebody's telling us about his wonderful news. Sometimes it's a little hard to say, "Hallelujah, amen!" Sometimes it's a little hard to—somebody tell me that you know what I'm saying right now. Somebody tell me that maybe I'm singing your song today; that it's not always easy to put that smile on when you got out of the house, and you know what's happening behind those closed doors. Your story's not as pretty as everyone else's. I'm going to keep saying it as long as I need to until you feel it. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

Isaiah 9:6 *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.*

Not just to Mary and Joseph. Amen? I was nineteen years old and I was in the navy, and I was stationed at Great Lakes, Illinois, just around the corner, down the street. I got invited to a Bible study. Pastor Davis, after the study, asked me if I knew Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I had to say no. I had heard that there had been a Jesus, but I didn't know that there *is* a Jesus. Sort of like Christopher Columbus; I heard that there was one, but I had never met him. I heard that he lived; and he did something, but I thought he was gone. I had heard that there had been a Jesus, but I was asked that night if I had a personal relationship with him. I thought, "How can you have a relationship with someone who was crucified; someone who was gone?" I believed that Jesus was here, but I didn't know that He still is here. It was that night, August 11th, 1973, that I entered into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I remember that, that night I was buried with Him in baptism, raised to walk in newness of life. That was the beginning of a walk with the lord that's personal.

He said, "For unto us a child is born..." This is Isaiah prophesying what we just read in Luke 2. You see, when the prophet Isaiah said it was going to happen, the people of Israel knew they needed a savior. The people of Israel thought, perhaps, that he was going to be a king that would come in a chariot, and there would be people proclaiming his arrival. My wife Debbie and I walked into church today, and I've got to tell you that I'm touched, and overwhelmed, and humbled, and a little embarrassed by the warm, wonderful welcome, but Jesus came into this earth without such a welcome. I'm just a pastor; He's our Lord and Savior. When Mary and Joseph showed up at the inn—and, remember, an inn is a place that has rooms. Now I want to tell you what it was like for Mary and Joseph that night. In the culture of that day if you showed up at an inn and you had any stature, if you had any position, if you had any wealth, if you had any notoriety, and there wasn't a room; they'd find you a room. Perhaps you've heard the joke about the guy—well, you think it's a joke, but it actually really happened. Preacher Howard was in the city, and there was a blizzard in Chicago. Preacher, you remember the night that you and I were in the city, and there was a blizzard, and we couldn't make it back to Waukegan. You went into the Palmer House, and you said, "I need a room for my friend and I. Could you get us a room with two beds?" They said, "Mister Howard, we don't have any rooms." He said, "You don't have any rooms in the whole hotel?" They said, "Mister Howard, we're sorry to tell you that, because of this blizzard, all of our rooms have been taken." Earlier that day, we had been with Nelson Mandela, because he came in to give a speech in Chicago, and it was really an honor to be invited to the luncheon. Preacher Howard got me a ticket, and we sat next to each other. Preacher said, "Well, if Nelson Mandela came in right now and wanted a room, would you find him a room?" They said, "If Nelson Mandela came in, we'd find him a room," and Preacher said, "He's not coming; I'll take his." You see, that's the way it was at an inn back in that day. So, someone would be asked, "Do you mind giving your room up for this dignitary?" But Mary and Joseph weren't dignitaries. Mary and Joseph weren't royalty. It's true that Mary was carrying the Christ-child, but the people of the inn didn't know. The people at the inn didn't understand. So, they said, "There's no room at the inn, but you can sleep with the animals." We'll often see scenes of a manger today built out of wood and hay, and a cute little lamb lying in there, and it smells nice, but the manger didn't smell nice that night. A manger in that day, in that part of the world was a cave, so imagine what a cave smells like. You say, "Preacher, you didn't have to go there." Maybe not; I won't stay here too long. Imagine what this cave, that the animals spent the night in, smells like. Well, you guys can go to the inn, that's here they sent our Lord and Savior with His biological mother and un-biological father. There they were in the inn; it was prophesied that it would happen there. It was the only place it could happen. Caesar Augustus was taxing the folks and the only reason they were there is to pay some taxes. Well, that's in the natural; in the spiritual, it was just so that the prophecy could be fulfilled. So, let me read verse 6 in its completeness, and then we'll move over to Luke 2, and spend a little time there.

Isaiah 9:6 *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful...*

How would you like Wonderful for Christmas this year? How would you like Wonderful for Christmas this year? Ladies, you ever talk to other ladies about finding Mister Wonderful? I've heard of him, but I'm not sure he really exists; he might be just a Fig Newton of your imagination. I mean, I just don't know if there is a such a thing as a Mister Wonderful. There is? Sonia said that, and Andy turned bright red. I'm going to ask again, because I didn't hear my wife respond: Is there such a thing as Mister Wonderful? Would you like Wonderful for Christmas? Would you like a Wonderful for Christmas? Isaiah said we got one. Isaiah said He was coming, but I came to tell you that He's already here. That's why I shared with you what I did about my testimony. I didn't know He was here. I didn't know that this Jesus was still right here, right now.

Let me interrupt this message to say that if you don't have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you can today. I didn't say join Christian Fellowship, I said enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Because, the day will come that that's the only thing that will matter.

Isaiah said He'd be Wonderful. Then he went on to say He'd be Counsellor. Some of you don't take advantage of that. Some of you don't take advantage of Counsellor. Jesus is there so that you can tell him when you need something. But a counsellor—some of you *think* Jesus is there so that you can tell him when you need something, is what I was trying to say, but Jesus is a counsellor, and some of us never knock on His door. Some of us never ask Him to counsel us. You know, a counsellor doesn't tell you what you want to hear, sometimes a counsellor tells you what you need to hear. And Jesus is a counsellor. I came to tell you today that some of you are living outside of the counsel of Christ. What is it like when the Lord says no to someplace you want to go? What is it like when the Lord says go to someplace you don't want to go? What is it like when the Lord says stop and you want to go and what is it like to get counsel from the Lord and accept it? And accept it? And accept it? Some of us don't ask the Lord for His counsel because we know that, once we get it... I don't have to finish that sentence.

Isaiah went on to say that not only would He be Wonderful, not only would He be Counsellor, He'd be the Mighty God. Is He your God? Is He your God today or is He just your bumper-sticker? The Mighty God, the Everlasting Father. I was talking about my father, earlier; some of you might have had a little twinge, like, "You know what? I never met my dad." Maybe you met him, and you sort of wish you hadn't. But, this Christmas, I came to remind you that you have an Everlasting Father. A Father that doesn't make mistakes. A Father who's always on time. A Father who, when you speak to Him, He'll speak back to you. A Father who will love you, even when you're unlovable. A Father who will tell you what's right, even when you're wrong. A Father who will never turn His back to you—and, yes, we have free will, we can turn our back on our Father, but He won't turn His back on us. A Father that, James referred to Him this way: When you draw nigh to Him, He will draw nigh to you (James 4:8). Hello? He said He'd be an Everlasting Father, and then he said—look out, now—He said He'd be the Prince of Peace. When you hear that verse, I've heard some people say, "If He was the Prince of Peace, then our world wouldn't be at war the way it is." Well, the peace that's here, right now, between His first coming and His second coming, is the peace that's within us. That perfect peace is yet to come; that peace in the world is yet to come. We don't like in a peaceful world right now, but we can have peace in the world. He said He would be the Prince of Peace, and I ask you, today, is He the Prince of Peace in your life? Is He the Prince of Peace in your life?

Apostle Paul was writing to the church at Colossi, and in chapter three and verse fifteen, he said, "...let the peace of God rule in your hearts..." (Colossians 3:15) When I hear that verse, I think of a throne, I get a picture of a throne, and I think, "Who's on the throne in my heart?" If it's God, it can be peace on that throne, but if God's not on that throne, you won't have peace in your heart. He said in that verse three things. He said, let the peace of God rule in your hearts, remember that you are called in one body; and be ye thankful. So, when you're fighting for peace—and maybe somebody came here today just to hear this—When you're lacking peace in your life, the words that follow that—and if you're writing notes, that's Colossians 3:15—the peace that will rule in your heart comes when we do these two things that follow it: when we remember that we were called into one body, and we're thankful. If you're lacking peace; if you're lacking peace, start counting your blessings. Start counting your blessings. There's an old song that says count your blessings; when you have trouble getting to sleep, count your blessings instead of sheep. I've got to tell you, there have been many nights when I'm thinking of my troubles, and I'm laying there, robbing me of sleep, and I think of that line from that song, and then I start thinking, "You know what? I've had this blessing in my life, and I've had this blessing in my life, and I've had this blessing in my life..." I think it's the old Indian proverb that says, "I complained because I had no moccasins, until I met a man who had no feet." Count your blessings.

So, now let's go to Luke chapter two, and see what it says about the fulfilling of this prophecy. I'm going to spend the remainder of my time here.

Luke 2:1-2 *And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)*

I won't take time to replay all the history of it, but when Mary and Joseph went to pay their taxes, it was the second year that tax had to be paid that way. So, it wasn't a historical thing, and there was no way for Isaiah the prophet to have known except that God spoke to Isaiah, and said, "This is the way it's going to happen," and that's why Mary and Joseph were there, so, it's a powerful component of the prophecy.

Luke 2:3-4 *And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem...*

Now, Jesus was prophesied that He would be born in the city of David, which is Bethlehem, but Mary and Joseph lived where? In Galilee. That's why all the ministry of Christ is in the area of Galilee—around the Sea of Galilee—because after they did this, they went home with Jesus. But, they were in Bethlehem to pay the tax. It's sort of an interesting work, the way that God works prophecy in a way that none of us could have.

Luke 2:4-6 *And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.*

She was ready to give birth while they were on this journey.

Luke 2:7 *And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.*

We talked about that.

Luke 2:8-10 *And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.*

Now, the shepherds didn't have an advance notice of this. They were living their day-to-day life. They were just doing what shepherds do. They were out in their field; they were tending to their sheep, and maybe you're here today and you're just living your life. You're just doing what you do. You're living where you live; you're going where you go. You've got your college plans; you've got your retirement plans; you've got everything worked out. But the angel appears to these shepherds, and he says, "Something's happening, and you're going to be a part of it." I don't know if there might be someone here today who will hear the Lord say to you, "Something's happening, and you're going to be a part of it." "Something's happening, and you're going to be a part of it." I hope that the message gets personal for you today. Those of you who have known me a long time know that I like this expression—I'm not even sure who I stole it from—but, it won't become powerful until it becomes personal. The Word of God

won't get powerful in your life until it becomes personal in your life. We're not just reading a history book about something that happened somewhere a long time ago; we're reading a book of prophecy that's fulfilled right here, right now. Let the church say amen.

Luke 2:9-12 *And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; [That's important] Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*

That was so counter-cultural. We talked about that earlier, about the room in the inn. "Wait a minute! Are you telling me this is someone powerful, someone mighty, and it's going to be in a manger?"

Luke 2:13-16 *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, good will toward men. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.*

Has the Lord made known to you that He's real? If He hasn't, then please believe this book. You don't have to believe me, but believe the Word of God. The Lord is here, and He wants to be made known to you today. That's the gift of Christmas. You can't say Christmas without saying Christ. Don't just go through this December and give and receive. Or, don't just go through this December, if this is a hard time for you—if this is a hard time for you, and I understand, the holidays can be hard for folks. I have tried to weave throughout this message that this isn't a wonderful time for a lot of folks, and I get that. I do get that. My grandfather, my mother's father, who I never met, he died on Christmas Eve. My mother said for a long time that it was hard for her to enjoy Christmas because her father died tragically and suddenly on Christmas Eve. I understand that sometimes something happens in life that changes the way we feel about this holiday, but don't let it cover up what it is that we're talking about: A Savior is born. He's your savior. He gives us free will; you can reject Him. You can say, "No, I don't want this gift." You could never unwrap it; you could leave it unopened; you could get to judgment and be turned away... "Oh, he didn't go there on a Christmas message!" Oh, yes, I did, because if you miss this gift, you've missed it all. You could celebrate a hundred Christmases, but if you don't receive Christ, you'll end up in the wrong place. Yes, I'm talking about Hell. None of us want to go to Hell. None of us want to go to Hell.

I met a man one day, and he told me that he wanted to go to Hell, because that's where all of his friends would be, and I said, "You know what? if I were you, I'd get a whole new group of friends. I'm going to Heaven, because that's where all of my friends will be." I'm sorry, but nobody's worth going to Hell for. There's no human being on earth I love more than my wife, Debbie. If Debbie said, "Pete, I think I'll just go to Hell," I'd say, "Well, I will miss you." Did I say that out loud, or did I just think that?

I'm trying to get you to realize how important this thing is. I'm trying to get you to realize how important this thing is. I'm going to wrap up.

Luke 2:16-17 *And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.*

Now, shepherds weren't the most popular people in that day. If a king were born, and you were writing the story, would you pick shepherds out of a field to announce his birth? maybe not. But, listen to what happens next:

Luke 2:18-20 *And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.*

That's what we're supposed to do, saints, is tell people about this savior. The shepherds did, and you can, and I can. Maybe you're hearing this today, and you're thinking, "I don't think I'm qualified." I want to tell you about the first person I shared the Gospel with. Some of you have heard this, because I've used it several times, for, those of you who have, bear with me, because I think it's important to reference, it might help someone. So, I gave my heart and life to Jesus—I made reference to that earlier in the message—and now I'm coming back to the barracks—I was in the navy—and I had a roommate. I thought, "Well, I sure needed the Lord, and he does, too." I said to him, "Hey, can I share a Bible study with you?" His name was Kevin. He said, "Yes." I opened my Bible to the only verse that I remembered; I'd been a Christian almost twenty-four hours. I remembered Matthew 5:16, because that one was sort of interesting to me, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." And I closed my Bible, and I said, "Do you want to give your life to Jesus?" and he said, "Yes, I do." I said, "Good. Let's pray," and we prayed. Then I said, "Are you ready to get baptized?" He said, "Yes, I am." I said, "Good. Come with me." Man, I was a rock star at Bible studies and creating converts. I was just—I was like the shepherd; I was telling everybody about Jesus. I didn't have the shepherd's hook, and I didn't have the sheep, but I was telling people about Jesus. Yeah, that was my first Bible study. The ones that followed didn't go quite that well, but, I want you to know that you can tell people about Jesus. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Amen?

For those of that had hoped for a message that had a real nice flow to it, I don't know if I should apologize, or tell you I'll be back. Sometimes I do preach a message that has a nice flow to it; sometimes I even use my notes. I had some really neat things in there, too. I had some jokes I was going to tell; some historical references... I was going to impress you with some knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, but I just came to tell you that there's a gift, and it's Jesus. It's for you. So, if I didn't tie together those two stories from the beginning, I'll do it as I close right now. You see, I thought that I wanted Ray Rosenbauer's bike, but my father had something better for me. Your Father's got something better for you than what you've already imagined. I thought I had something to feel sorry for, when my mother didn't remember who I was, but I found out that really, I had something to be thankful for. So, I came today to tell you to be thankful for what you've got.

I'm going to turn this pulpit back to Parrish, and however he chooses to close, but I pray that this Christmas won't get lost in decorations, and the traditional carols, but it will get found in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. God bless you; merry Christmas.