
CLUTTERED
Christmas

The Christmas season is full of opportunities to celebrate, but between holiday parties, family gatherings, concerts, and countless commitments, it can quickly become overwhelming. In the midst of all the extra, it's easy to lose sight of what Christmas is truly about. Nearly two thousand years ago, in Bethlehem, a star shone brightly, angels sang, shepherds rejoiced, Magi brought gifts, and the focus of their festivities was clear. The Savior of the World had arrived! Join us as we navigate a ***Cluttered Christmas***, learning to set aside the distractions, embrace the joy of the season, and keep our focus on Jesus.

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WEEK ONE ..... MATTHEW 2:1-12

WEEK TWO..... LUKE 2:8-15

WEEK THREE ..... LUKE 2:16-20

WEEK FOUR ..... MATTHEW 2:1-2

WEEK FIVE..... REVELATION 1:4-8



WEEK ONE

MATTHEW 2:1-12

[1] After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi
from the east came to Jerusalem [2] and asked, “Where is the one who has been born
king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

[3] When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. [4] When
he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked
them where the Messiah was to be born. [5] “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for
this is what the prophet has written:

[6] “‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

[7] Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the
star had appeared. [8] He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully
for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship
him.”

[9] After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen
when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.
[10] When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. [11] On coming to the house, they saw
the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then
they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and
myrrh. [12] And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned
to their country by another route.

Christmas shopping has taken on a life of its own. More and more stores are starting their push towards Christmas earlier than ever, and it's easy to understand why. Christmas sales account for a significant portion of annual retail sales. Collectively, Americans spend, on average, a trillion dollars on Christmas gifts, decorations, food, and travel each year. *A trillion dollars.* For context, think about it this way. If you were to count out loud to one trillion, it would take around 31,710 years.





For many of us, Christmas shopping is about finding the perfect gift for everyone we love. There's something special about watching someone open a gift you've carefully chosen for them. We enjoy the opportunity to make someone feel loved, appreciated, and cared for.

In this passage, the Magi traveled a long way to give extravagant gifts to Jesus. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh were gifts of great value. The magi brought these gifts as an act of worship to Jesus.

The extravagance of our Christmas gifts isn't necessarily the problem. It's not wrong to enjoy giving, to bless our families, or to make Christmas special for the people we love. Those things can be beautiful expressions of love and generosity.

But in the busyness and excitement of the season, it's easy for our focus to drift. We can spend weeks planning, shopping, budgeting, and preparing for Christmas without giving much thought to how we will celebrate the One whose birth we're remembering.

Many of us plan ahead for the additional expenses of Christmas. We set aside money for gifts, make shopping lists, and carefully choose gifts for each person. What if we were just as intentional about the gifts we bring to Jesus? The greatest gift we can offer Him isn't something we buy. It's our time, our attention, our obedience, our generosity, and our worship.

SERMON NOTES

November 29 | Christmas Shopping | Matthew 2:1-12

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The Magi traveled a great distance looking for Jesus, while Herod was disturbed by the news of His birth. What do these different responses reveal about the condition of our hearts when Jesus enters our lives?

Matthew tells us the Magi were overjoyed when they saw the star and bowed down to worship Jesus when they found Him. What does their response teach us about the relationship between joy, generosity, and worship?

The Magi brought valuable gifts to Jesus, but their first response was to bow before Him. How might the order of their actions challenge the way we approach gift-giving and Christmas celebrations this year?

Giving gifts can be a beautiful expression of love. When might our desire to find the perfect gift, create the perfect experience, or meet everyone's expectations begin to distract us from the One we're celebrating? How do you know when you've crossed that line?

The Magi returned home by a different route after encountering Jesus. What might need to change in the way you approach Christmas this year so that your celebration more clearly reflects your worship of Him?



LUKE 2:8-15

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their
flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord
shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be
afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the
town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be
a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising
God and saying,

14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one
another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the
Lord has told us about.”

Do you have a memory from a church or school Christmas program?

Maybe you remember putting on your Christmas outfit and being excited to sing with the other kids, or maybe you remember a moment of sadness or fear when you realized how many people were watching while you couldn’t quite remember the words or the actions.

Regardless of which memories come to mind, there's something worth remembering: We sometimes put the pressure of perfection on something God intended to be an expression of worship.

Think about the shepherds in this passage. They had just received the most extraordinary news imaginable. The Savior had been born! They hurried to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph. When they saw the baby Jesus lying in the manger, they celebrated what they had found and went to tell others.

I wonder what that first celebration sounded like. Did everyone sing in perfect harmony? Did they know all the words?

I doubt it...

Did anyone miss a note or stumble over what they wanted to say?

Probably!

But I don't think any of that mattered. They had encountered Jesus, and their hearts were overflowing with joy. The shepherds remind us that worship isn't about putting on a perfect performance. It's about responding to a perfect Savior with joy and thanksgiving.

That is the approach we get to have in the Christmas season. We get to come to Jesus in worship with joy and thanksgiving. It doesn't have to be perfect. It's just about glorifying Jesus and celebrating God's great love for His people.

Rather than being concerned about performance or perfection, let's rejoice in response to great news. Our Savior has been born!

SERMON NOTES

December 6 | Christmas Program | Luke 2:8-15

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The shepherds were terrified when the angel appeared, but the first words they heard were, “Do not be afraid.” What does this encounter reveal about God’s heart toward ordinary people?

The angel announced that a Savior had been born and that this was “good news of great joy for all people” *(Luke 2:10)*. Why do you think the identity of Jesus is more important than the circumstances surrounding His birth?

The angels responded to the birth of Jesus by praising God and declaring His glory. What does their worship teach us about where the focus of our Christmas celebrations – and our worship services – belongs?

Christmas programs, gatherings, and traditions often become performances that we feel like we must get just right. How might our desire for everything to be perfect actually interfere with our ability to experience and express joy?

After hearing the announcement, the shepherds decided to go and see Jesus for themselves. What would it look like for you or your family to move beyond simply hearing the Christmas story to intentionally responding to Jesus this season?



LUKE 2:16-20

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in
the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what
had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what
the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered
them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the
things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

What is your family's tradition for Christmas food? Most families have some sort of a plan that plays out every year. For some, it's soups that meld their flavors together in crockpots all day long. Some prepare a huge turkey. Others smoke a brisket or some ribs.

Maybe your traditions revolve around the side dishes. Green bean casserole or corn bread. Mashed potatoes or "burn-and-serve" rolls.

And what about the desserts? Pies as far as the eye can see. Christmas cookies in every shape and size. Oreo balls, chocolate-dipped pretzels, almond-bark covered Nutter Butters. No matter what part of the Christmas meal is your favorite, it seems we always eat too much and end up uncomfortably full.

But have you ever stopped to wonder why food plays such a big role in our Christmas celebrations?

In the Midwest, it is easy to understand. So much of what we do revolves around food, and Christmas is no exception. But there's actually an interesting connection between food and the very first Christmas

In the passage, it says that Jesus was lying in a manger. A manger was a feeding trough for animals, and it's no suprise that there was one available in the stable where Jesus was born. It's possible Jesus was laid in something like the one pictured here on that first night.



Jesus, the Son of God, was laid in a place that was ordinarily used to feed and sustain animals.

Years later, during His ministry, Jesus makes an incredible statement about Himself: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35)

Jesus was teaching people that He is all we need in order to be sustained and satisfied in this life. We don't need anything but Him. He provides all we need to live life to the fullest.

On His very first night on earth, this concept is embodied as Jesus is placed in a manger. In something used to sustain animals, we find the One who sustains us.

Jesus didn't come simply to make our lives a little better. He came to give us life in Him. He is enough for our deepest needs and our greatest struggles. He alone is our eternal hope.

There are no wasted details in the Bible. Sometimes we pass over these details to get to the "main point" of a passage, but all of it matters. The baby in the manger is the hope of the world, the Redeemer of His people, and the One who came to set the captives free. He is also our Sustainer. He is the Bread of Life, and He invites us to find our deepest satisfaction in Him.

So, as you look at your nativity scene this Christmas, take another look at the manger. Remember that the One who was laid in that feeding trough is the One who can truly satisfy your soul.

SERMON NOTES

December 13 | Christmas Feast | Luke 2:16-20

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

After finding Jesus, the shepherds shared what they had been told, and those who heard their story were amazed. Why do you think encountering Jesus naturally led the shepherds to tell others about Him?

Luke tells us that Mary treasured these things and pondered them in her heart. What might Mary's response teach us about the importance of slowing down and making room to recognize what God is doing?

The shepherds returned to their ordinary lives glorifying and praising God. How might an encounter with Jesus change the way we approach everyday responsibilities, relationships, and routines?

Christmas meals and traditions bring people together, but the preparation and busyness can sometimes consume our attention. What might it look like to create space for gratitude, reflection, and worship in our celebrations?

Jesus was laid in a manger, an ordinary feeding trough. Later, he would describe Himself as the Bread of Life *(John 6:35)*. What are some things we look to for the satisfaction, security, or fulfillment that only Jesus can ultimately provide?

WEEK FOUR

MATTHEW 2:1-2

[1] After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi
from the east came to Jerusalem [2] and asked, “Where is the one who has been born
king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

Do you have anyone in your neighborhood or in your family that goes totally overboard on Christmas decorations?



“She’s a beaut Clark…”

There are all sorts of ways to show your Christmas spirit. Sometimes that means hanging lights all over your house. Sometimes it means buying your local Menards out of inflatable characters to put all over your yard.

Maybe you’re a little more subtle and prefer to use your decorating budget on the inside of your home.

Regardless of where you put most of your decorations, there’s one thing that’s pretty consistent about Christmas decorations… almost everything seems to light up. Now, here in the Midwest, part of that is practical. During Christmastime there are only about nine hours of daylight, and if you are going to see something… it better light up.

The original reason for light playing such a big role in Christmas decoration is to point back to Jesus, the Light of the World, arriving on earth.

In the passage, we read that a group of Magi traveled from the East after seeing an unusual star in the sky. From what they had read, they understood that this extraordinary star meant that a new King had been born in Jerusalem.

They followed the star until it led them to Jesus, where they bowed down and worshiped Him.

Light is a remarkable thing. It dominates everything. Even a small amount of light can be seen in a dark room. Darkness is just a description of the absence of light. Light doesn't have to fight darkness to overcome it. It simply shines, and the darkness gives way.

Jesus is that Light.

In John 8:12, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

So we celebrate by putting up lights to help us remember that Jesus is the Light of the World. When we hang lights on our homes, decorate our trees, or drive around town looking at Christmas displays, we have an opportunity to remember the One who came to bring light into our dark world.

Our decorations don't have to win a contest or be the biggest display on the block. But what if they reminded us to be intentional about sharing the light of Jesus with the people around us?

Jesus, the Light of the World, calls His followers to reflect His light to the world. We are called to be a light shining in the darkness, a light to the nations, a city on a hill.

This Christmas season, let the love of Jesus shine through you.

SERMON NOTES

December 20 | Christmas Decorations | Matthew 2:1-2

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The Magi recognized the significance of the star and responded by setting out to find Jesus. What does their willingness to pursue him reveal about the importance of recognizing and responding to God's invitation?

The Magi didn't travel simply to see an extraordinary star. They came to worship the newborn King. What is the difference between being impressed by something associated with God and actually worshiping God Himself?

Christmas is filled with lights, decorations, and traditions that can remind us of Jesus. How can we recognize when the things intended to point us toward Him have become the focus of our attention?

In John 8:12, Jesus calls Himself the Light of the World and promises that those who follow Him will have the light of life. What does it mean to follow His light rather than simply admire it? How do you let the light that is in you shine?

As you look at the Christmas lights and decorations around you, how might you use those reminders to reflect the love and light of Jesus to your family, neighbors, or someone who may be experiencing a difficult Christmas?



WEEK FIVE

REVELATION 1:4-8

4 John,
To the seven churches in the province of Asia:
Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

7 "Look, he is coming with the clouds,"
and "every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him";
and all peoples on earth "will mourn because of him."
So shall it be! Amen.

8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

The worst part of the Christmas season has to be cleaning up the mess.

Do you walk into your kitchen and see the mountains of dishes, the tons of leftovers, and the hours of cleaning it's going to take to restore some sense of order?

Do you wonder where you are going to be able to take all the trash your crew created because there is no chance it will all fit in your trash can?

Maybe the mess isn't quite as tangible. Maybe it's emotional. Are you still thinking about that passive-aggressive comment from a family member after another gathering filled with tension? Are you feeling burnt out after all the festivities?

Our experiences in the aftermath of Christmas are as varied as the celebrations themselves. Some of us need a few days away from people to recharge. Others keep moving at an unrealistic pace, hoping that if we stay busy enough, we won't have to deal with everything that's catching up to us.

And yet, by the time fall rolls around, many of us have forgotten the stress and exhaustion of the previous holiday season, and we get ready to do it all again.

Have you ever stopped to wonder if there's something we're missing? There is more to life than simply moving from one celebration to the next, cleaning up the mess, and preparing for the next big event.

Consider what the disciples experienced. They met the Messiah! They left their homes, occupations, and families to follow Jesus. For more than three years, they walked with Him and listened to His teaching.

Then, in what must have seemed like an instant, everything changed. Jesus was arrested, crucified, and buried. The One they believed was the Messiah was gone. Now what?

But then, something extraordinary happened.

Jesus was alive! He had defeated death. The disciples encountered the risen Jesus, and He had more to teach them. After forty more days, Jesus ascended to heaven, leaving the disciples with the promise that one day He will return.

That promise changes how we live today. We aren't just sitting around waiting for Jesus to return. He has given us work to do while we wait. We are called to share the gospel with those who don't yet know Jesus. We are called to love and serve one another, care for our neighbors, and bring hope to our communities.

We don't have to wait for Jesus' return with fear or dread. We can wait with excitement and anticipation. We wait understanding the promise and the opportunity Jesus has given us.

So as the Christmas season winds down, don't let the aftermath become the whole story. Yes, there will be cleaning up to do, but there's also an opportunity waiting in front of us. An opportunity to live with purpose and share the hope of Jesus.

SERMON NOTES

December 27 | Christmas Aftermath | Revelation 1:4-8

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

John describes Jesus as “the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth” *(Revelation 1:5)*. How do these descriptions expand our understanding of the baby whose birth we celebrate at Christmas?

Revelation 1:5–6 reminds us that Jesus loves us, has freed us from our sins, and has made us a kingdom and priests to serve God. How do you imagine these truths shaping our identity and the way we live beyond the Christmas season?

John reminds us that Jesus is coming again. How does the promise of His return change the way we think about our priorities, our relationships, and the things that occupy our attention? Does this promise change the way we think?

When Christmas is over, we often find ourselves exhausted, cleaning up, or returning to familiar routines. What might the aftermath of Christmas reveal about what we’ve been pursuing, and how might remembering who Jesus is help us reorder our priorities?

God describes Himself as the Alpha and the Omega, the One who is, who was, and who is to come *(Revelation 1:8)*. As we move beyond Christmas and into a new year, what would it look like to live with Jesus at the center of our lives rather than simply at the center of a holiday?