

## The Perfect Gift Matthew 1:21,25, Luke 1:31

### Introduction

Are any of you glad this part of the season is now over? Fighting the crowds. The insane traffic. Searching high and low for that one thing. The good news is that we don't have to worry about this for eleven more months! I have to admit, that other than just scouring some websites looking for certain items, like the elusive Hatchimal, I didn't do much pushing and shoving this year. But aren't we all after the perfect gift. We can worry and fret, experience all kinds of anxiety, wondering if we have gotten the perfect gift for those we love. What should be a season of love and peace, feels more like a season of stress and heartburn.

If you watch the remainder of Jingle All the Way, spoiler alert, is this dad is feverishly running around trying to find this one action hero, when all along what his son really wanted was him. His dad. And isn't that the case? We spend hours picking out the "right" present just so they can play with the box it came in when they open it. Let's see a show of hands who that happened to this morning!

This idea of looking for the perfect gift isn't new. In fact, there are a lot of similarities to the day Jesus was born. Hundreds of years before he was born, prophets foretold about a coming Messiah. One who would save his people. Isaiah wrote, *"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."* (Isaiah 7:14) He also wrote, *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever."*

For a group of people who had been oppressed by other empires and powers, this was a welcome prophecy. And they were constantly looking. Where is the promised Messiah? If they were like me looking for certain presents this year, they stopped looking after after about 15 minutes. But of course, the people wanted their freedom. They wanted to be out from under the oppressive rule of these nations. So they watched and waited.

But what they wanted and expected and what they needed and received were going to be two totally different things. God saw their position in life. He understood that the physical oppression and rule by these pagan nations created great hardship for them. But he also knew there was a greater need that they had. A need they couldn't even see in themselves.

And so one day, in a tiny village, a young woman, and her husband, who were relegated to the stable or cave behind the house, gave birth to a son. How could this possibly have been the perfect gift? From the outside, it looks like a mistake. Mary or Joseph must have misheard or misunderstood. In the shadow of the powerful leader Herod, a child is born and this is supposed to be the one who will reign with an everlasting kingdom. How could this be? What was God thinking?

### The Name Jesus

When you read the Christmas story, one of the aspects I find most fascinating is when the angels appear to Mary and Joseph and they tell them what to name the child. How many of you, by a show of hands, spent time when naming your children to look at the meaning of your child's name? Baby name books? How many of you remember it today?

Thanks to my parents, Brent originated as a surname for those who lived by or in an area that had been burned. It also comes from a old Celtic word that meant "steep" or "steep hill" and was granted to those living on one. It was also a reference to those who had been branded or burned, particularly a criminal who had been branded. Thanks mom and dad!

Today, we don't pay as much attention to the meaning of a name, We find cute names, names that sound good with our last names, family names. But it hasn't always been this way. In the Bible, things were a little different.

Look at Matthew 1:20—23. The angel tells both Mary and Joseph what they are to name the child, Jesus, or Yeshua. This was a very common name in first century, given as a symbol of their hope in the coming Messiah. He wasn't the only Jesus.

For hundreds of years, the Israelites had been in captivity, suffering under the hand of a foreign power. People would name their children Jesus, Yeshua, as a reminder of God's promise of a Savior. But as the angel explains it to Joseph, this is more than just a hopeful name this time. This is it. This is THE Jesus. He will be the Savior.

Matthew reminds his readers of the Isaiah prophecy and reveals an equally important name. Immanuel. God with us. Jesus, Immanuel, brought God's presence to man. God himself enters our brokenness. He doesn't tell us how to fix things here, he comes to fix it himself. He doesn't give an instruction manual. He comes near.

And in doing so, he shows us that our greatest need isn't what we think it is. Where we think our greatest need is comfort, wealth, status, or even health, God looks into our world and sees the greater need, our spiritual need, and gives us the perfect gift.

Not the Gift They Wanted but the Gift They Needed

Like it is for us often times, this gift wasn't the kind they were looking for. Life was hard for the Jews under Roman oppression. Rome ruled with an iron fist. Pax Romana didn't exist because everyone was so glad to be there. No. The peace of Rome was because they were willing to do anything and everything to remain within the lines.

When looking for a Messiah, the Jews were looking for someone to come free them from this oppression, someone who would be from the line of David and reestablish his earthly throne, as a great and powerful king. But that's not what they got.

They were looking for someone to be a great, charismatic leader, who would uphold their religious traditions both written and oral. Someone who would be a super Pharisee. But that's not what they got.

They wanted a mighty military leader, someone who would come in and start winning major battles for Israel. But that's not what they got.

Is there anything more disappointing than getting a present you didn't want? I can remember as a kid going to my grandparent's house. We were set to open presents. They didn't always get the best gifts but when you are seven, just about any toy will do. This year they hand out the gifts and I rip into it. And there they were...socks. Can you believe it? Socks for a seven year old! Not what I wanted...at all!

In the birth of Jesus, Israel didn't get what they wanted. But they got what they desperately needed. They thought they needed a powerful political figure, what they needed was forgiveness of sin. They thought they needed a military leader, what they needed was a spiritual savior.

And this perfect gift isn't like the toys we give our children that will be forgotten in about 30 minutes or in the trash in about 4 days. This is a gift that radically transforms us from the inside out and lasts forever.

This Christmas may we be reminded that chasing after the wrong gift will never bring peace and joy. Yes, it may satisfy for the moment, but only the perfect gift of Christ can bring peace that passes understanding, unspeakable joy, enduring hope, and perfect love.