

CALL HIS NAME JESUS:

(5) TO US

Isaiah 9:6-7

Galatians 4:4-7

Luke 2:1-20

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SCRIPTURE

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's Armies will make this happen! (Isaiah 9:6-7 NLT).

But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir (Galatians 4:4-7 NLT).

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria. All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child. And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them (Luke 2:1-7 NLT).

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but

the angel reassured them. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.” Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased” (Luke 2:8-14 NLT).

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds’ story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them (Luke 2:15-20 NLT).

MESSAGE

Christmas is all about giving. We spend a lot of time and effort shopping – well, some people do – for just the right gift for each person on our list. We carefully wrap the gift box in bright paper and ribbon, label it with a gift tag and place it under the tree. Children like to search under the tree for the gifts with their names on the tags, shaking the boxes and trying to guess what's inside. Most adults, even if they don't want to admit it, don't mind finding a few gifts with their names on the gift tags. We might even shake a box or two if we think no one is looking.

Christmas is all about giving because God gave us the gift above all gifts, the gift of his Son. And what a gift he is! This is the promised Son, promised for centuries before he was given. He is the Son in whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. And the names he has, show us that he is God in the flesh: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

This gift, this Child, this Son, will bear the weight of government on his shoulder, the reign of God. We often debate about our earthly governments and the extent of their power — should a government have more power and influence over our lives or less? But this Son's government, his reign and the peace he brings will extend through time and into eternity. Unlike earthly rulers, he will rule with justice and righteousness. God

himself will see to it that this unending reign of peace and power is established. This Child, this Son, is a gift, and whose name is on the gift tag? The prophet Isaiah makes it clear. This gift tag is labeled "To Us!" "For a child is born to us, a son is given to us." This Son, this gift, is given to you and to me, to the world.

This wonderful gift was announced to shepherds in Bethlehem on the first Christmas night. The angel said that he had "good news that will bring great joy to all people." What was that good news for all people? "The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!" "To us," the prophet had said. Now, "To you," the angel says. Mary's firstborn son, the Son of God, was born to his earthly parents, into the family line of King David, to Mary, his mother, and to Joseph, his adopted earthly father. But this Son of Mary and Son of God was born not just for them and to them, but – as the angel said – to and for all people. This Son, Jesus the Savior, is a gift for the world, given out of God's love and grace.

Like children excited to open the gifts under the tree, the shepherds who first heard the news about the Savior immediately decided to go see their newborn gift. They ran off to Bethlehem, and following the angel's description, they found their gift, Mary's firstborn son, lying in a manger. This was their gift, the angel had said. But as soon as they had seen the newborn Son of God, they began to share their gift with others. "After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished." This Son, Jesus, had not been given only to them. His birth was "good news that will bring great joy to all people."

The familiar Christmas song tells us that Santa Claus is "making a list and checking it twice." He has to determine who is naughty or nice, who deserves a gift and who deserves only a lump of coal in their stocking. Parents may even remind their children, as Christmas approaches, to be good if they expect to receive any gifts from Santa.

The gift of God's Son, this gift for those shepherds, for the people of Bethlehem, for you and me, for all people, is not a gift that we earned or deserved. Our fallen human nature goes way beyond "naughty." Scripture is quite blunt about it: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside" (Romans 3:10-12). We don't deserve any of God's gifts. We are not even worth a lump of coal. With our sin, with our daily rebellion against God, we deserve only judgment and separation from God.

This gift, this Son, is not given because we deserve him. He is given to us out of God's grace, his undeserved favor for those who have turned away from God. He is given because "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." Jesus, the Son of God, God

himself in the flesh, was given to us as a sacrifice for our sins. Jesus offered up his life on the cross to suffer the penalty we deserved. Jesus was crucified and raised up from death so that we now are adopted as sons and daughters into the family of God. We are forgiven, and we receive from our Gift another gift – the gift of eternal life.

With every gift you have wrapped for this holy day of celebration, remember Jesus, the son of Mary and Son of God, who was wrapped snugly in strips of cloth and laid in a manger. With every gift you unwrap tonight and tomorrow, remember the gift, the Son who was given "to us."