

What are you going to get for Christmas?

Instead of that question pushing you into selfishness and greed, by the end of this sermon, let's have that question push us into praise to God for what we get for Christmas. In fact, we have a Christmas sermon series starting, about what we get for Christmas. So, today is the first message.

Why did Christ come? Christ came into the world to save sinners. Paul wrote at the beginning of this sentence that this is a trustworthy statement, deserving our full acceptance. It is a reliable statement. It is a sure, a dependable word. It is faithful saying. We can rely on it. Do you trust this statement

The verse also says that this sentence is worthy of the fullest acceptance. It is fit for the greatest of reception with us. It has the highest degree of places of welcome for us. We should give it supreme place in our commitments. We are to give it our full openness. This truth above all should meet your complete, unhesitating approval.

The Bible says this approach is proper, fitting, and worthwhile.

**We celebrate Christmas, because of mercy.**

### **1. Christ came.**

Verse 15, *"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."*

SI - If you are going to do something significant, you plan for it. If you are going to buy a car, you plan whether you will buy new or used, foreign or domestic, car or truck, gas or diesel, stick or automatic, leather or cloth. If you are going to buy a house, you plan whether you are going to build or buy an existing house, whether it will be in the city or the country, whether it will be a duplex or a single home, size of yard, needing work or ready to move in, and so on. The point is if you are going to do something significant, you plan for it.

Since God was saving scores of sinners from eternal death, and building a world-wide church, we aren't surprised to find that a plan lies behind it.

Christ did not just stand up one day and say, "Father, I think I'll go into the world and become a man and save people from death. I'll be back in a little over 30 years." No, no, no.

Long before Christ came on the first Christmas, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit agreed about Christ's coming, and had a plan for it.

Long before the foundation of the world, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit agreed about Christ's coming, and had a plan for it.

When God plans for something, it happens exactly as He planned.

It was the Father's plan, and Christ came because He agreed with the Father's plan. It was the Father's plan, and the Holy Spirit overshadowed the

Virgin Mary, bringing Christ into the womb of the Virgin Mary. The Holy Spirit participated in Christmas, because the Holy Spirit agreed with the Father's plan.

Psalm 2:8, "*Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.*" Who is speaking to whom there? When you study Psalm 2, you find that it is the Father speaking to the Son. God the Father promised to God the Son the whole world as His possession. God gave His Son the world, if the Son will ask for it. Did the Son ask for it? Would the Son agree to the Father's plan?

Yes, for we read in Psalm 40:7-8, "*Then I said, "Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your law is within My heart.*"

The plan of God the Father included Christ coming to earth. The redemptive plan of the Father started with Christmas. Christ responded to the purpose of the Father. The Son willingly submitted to the plan of the Father. Because of that agreement, Jesus came! This agreement between God the Father and God the Son was a covenant from all eternity to save sinners. This is called the Covenant of Redemption. God the Father and God the Son agreed to redeem fallen man. This covenant stands prior to Christmas. The Father sent the Son, and the Son came. The Son obeyed the Father. Philippians 2:8, "*And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*"

## **2. Christ came into the world.**

Our Lord Jesus left the heaven of heaven to enter this hostile world. The term "world" speaks of a spiritual realm at enmity with God, and all of His plans and purposes. The prince of this world, this spiritual realm in which we live, is the devil. 2 Corinthians 4:4, "*the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*"

When is this more evident than on Christmas? We have a civil holiday in our nation, to observe the coming of Christ! Yet even with this truth, and all of the Christmas programs, cantatas and worship services, cards and carols, the minds of the unbelieving are blind to the core of Christmas. In a country that spends millions of dollars lighting up trees and houses and streets in a special way for Christmas, the unbelieving still do not see the light of the gospel in the glory of Christ. There are millions of people having extra days off of work and off of school directly because of the Christian truth that Christ came into the world, and still the unbelievers waste the extra time off, without seeing the good news.

It was into this world that God sent His Son. It was into this domain of darkness that Christ came. Colossians 1:13, "*He has delivered us from the domain*

*of darkness...*” The Father sent His Son into the devil’s dark domain, in order to establish the kingdom of light.

Christ entered enemy territory. He came into the world that was in every way antagonistic toward Him. John 1:11 shows us that even the Jews did not receive Jesus, though we might be warranted to expect them to receive the Jewish Messiah, *“He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.”* In fact, so far were the Jews from receiving Jesus Christ, that the Jewish people were the ones who took Jesus to the Roman governor and accused Jesus of revolution. In Mark 15:14, *“...Pilate said to [the Jews], “Why? What evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him.”* Christ a Jew had entered enemy territory. The Jewish leaders hated Jesus. If this meant they needed to arrange for His murder, they were willing. This is the world into which Christ willingly and obediently came.

When Christ came, think about where He came FROM. Christ left behind the glories of God’s throne room in heaven. Hebrews 9:11, *“...when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation).”* The heavens from where Christ came are not a part of this earthly creation. Heaven is outside of, beyond, or above this earthly created order. The heavens are outside of this world. But Jesus came from heaven into this world. The Creator became a part of the creation.

Christ Jesus came FROM the very center of heaven, being the Holy Creator God who sits enthroned in all glory, majesty, and splendor. Christ came FROM the most holy place of all, greater and more perfect than the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle, not made with hands. Christ came into the fallen, sinful, hostile world. The coming of Christ into the world was the beginning of His humiliation. When Mary, still a Virgin, was found to be with Child by the Holy Spirit, that was the first signal to anyone in the world that the humiliation of Christ had begun. His birth was an infinite step down from heaven to earth.

The manger is an indicator of Christ coming down in humiliation. A manger? A feeding trough? No loving mother would choose to put her child in a cattle trough; yet the loving Heavenly Father allowed His newborn Son to be placed into the manger for His very first bed.

Christ came into the world. The world in which sickness, starvation, and death are frequent. In our world, murder, greed, lust, and hatred dominate the news. The world into which Christ came is in decay. The world is passing away. The world is a sinking ship. Christ boarded a sinking ship. Christ left unspeakable splendor to enter the war zone the Bible calls *“the lower regions, the earth.”*  
Ephesians 4:9

God gave to His Son, the World!

Then, God gave to the world, His Son.

We often have heard John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”*

God so loved the world that He gave His Son.

But we don't often hear the previous gift.

Before God gave to the world His Son, God gave to His Son, the world!

### **3. Christ came into the world to save sinners.**

Verses 15, *“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, ...”*

Here is the clear purpose of Jesus' coming. It is the reason for Christmas. This is why Christ came. To save sinners.

This means that at Christmas it would be proper and germane to talk about sinners and sin. The world's Christmas gets sentimental and sappy, so that people conclude that it is supposed to be exclusively joyful and light-hearted and exuberant. People speak of ruining Christmas and rescuing Christmas. Sentimental Christmastime is when people say, “Let's forget our troubles and not call them to mind at all, because it's Christmas!” But the heart of Christmas is that Christ came to save sinners!

All the Christmas packages, and Christmas wrapping paper camouflage the pain of heart that we really have. Why are we quietly and secretly hurting? Because of our own sin. The Christmas lights around the city are beautiful. The music on the radio stations is delightful. The atmosphere is full of expectation. -- What are you going to do? -- What are you going to receive? -- What foods are you going to enjoy? But wait, what about the underlying truth? Who is going to save you? Save you from what? From your own sins - because you do remember that before, during and after Christmas, YOU ARE A SINNER.

When you are descending into a funk of your own mind and making, what is happening there? Your sin is choking you. Paul knows that we struggle with being consistently joyful at Christmas. Christ knows that we struggle with all of life, not just during Christmastime. We need the Savior who came for us sinners.

What is the central truth of Christmas? Mercy. What are you going to get for Christmas? Mercy! So, the title of the sermon is Mercy for Christmas. Verse 16 *“But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.”* Only when we grasp this truth of Christmas mercy, does real joy come. Only when we understand the truth of this passage does every Christmas gift remind us that we have already received the best Christmas gift - mercy. Only when we understand the truth of this Bible verse does every

Christmas song remind us of the Christ who has come into the world and put a song in our hearts.

The truth is that Christmas is the coming of Christ because we are sinners who needed a Savior. You are a sinner, I am a sinner. If we do not consider ourselves to be sinners, then we have removed the reason for Christ's coming. Without the recognition that we are sinners, do you realize how empty Christmas becomes? We just want good stuff, good food, good feelings, and we sort of think we deserve it.

Here is Christmas story if we take out our sin and God's mercy.

Santa came.

Santa came down the chimney.

Santa came down the chimney with goodies for good people.

That is how empty Christmas becomes, if we take out our sin and God's mercy.

For your Christmas to have meaning, it must be built on truth. To begin, you must admit your sinfulness. The worst part about your Christmas is you're your sins and wrongs! You need saving! The angel told Joseph regarding Mary, '*...she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins*' (Matthew 1:21) The very name Jesus means save from sins.

The world says that Santa does not come for those who were naughty.

If you are naughty, that is the end. No mercy. No gifts.

The Bible says that Jesus did not come for those who think they are nice. Jesus came for us naughty ones. Christ said in Matthew 9:13, "*I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*"

Please don't misunderstand Christmas. Don't for example, think you're righteous because you attend church or do things. Self-righteousness is repugnant to God. It will never do to rely on personal works to earn benefits from God in heaven. Sin sticks to everything we touch.

How do you gain a right standing before God? Let me answer that by telling a story. "*Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'* But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, '*God, be merciful to me, a sinner!*'

How do you gain a right standing before God? Mercy.

I borrowed that story from Jesus, who told this story in Luke 18. Here is the conclusion: Jesus said, "*I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.*"

Paul wrote in our passage in verse 15, that Paul is the foremost of sinners. Paul was first in line. The lead sinner. In the group of sinners, I am the first one. If there were a strong example of a sinner needing to be saved, Paul says, 'it was me!'

What Paul is doing is placing himself in the position of that hated cheating tax collector from Jesus' parable.

In the next verse, 1 Timothy 1:16, Paul wrote, "...I received mercy for this reason..."

For what reason? Why was Paul shown mercy? (v.16) "*...But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.*"

Paul is an example to us, for how the Christian life goes.

Paul is an example to us, for how to celebrate Christmas!

How should we celebrate Christmas?

To celebrate Christmas, we must depend on the mercy and patience of God.

This is good news!! This is the center of Christmas. This is why the angels sang. This is what the prophets foretold. This is what was fulfilled when all the prophecies came true. This is why the wise men made their journey. This is why the shepherds went over to see what the angels were saying. This is why Mary pondered these things in her heart. This is why the disciples went forth after Jesus ascension to heaven. This is why the church exists today. This is the reason for the Christmas season. We call it the gospel.

Do not think of yourself as nice, so you can receive presents you deserve.

Think of yourself as naughty, so you can receive mercy you do not deserve. Think of yourself as naughty, for you are. You are naughty. You are! Think of yourself as naughty, for Christ came into the world to save sinners. That's why Christ came. The Bible says that this deserves full acceptance. Do you fully accept this?

**Concluding Lessons:** Praise Him.

Christmas is not about you. Don't raise your expectations and desires. Don't make Christmas about you. Don't be the sinner that makes Christmas about you. Did you get what you want, did you go where you want, did you hear what you want, did you gather with the people you want. Do you have the life you want?

You got mercy for Christmas. What would you do without mercy?

Maybe a favorite Christmas song should be amazing Grace – how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see. All the fuss about Christmas is so that we can praise Christ for what we do not deserve. Paul flows naturally right into verse 17 – *To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Christmas is a time for us the saved sinners to give honor to the King.  
Let's do that. Let's praise Him.