

Excerpt of “The Gifts of Christmas Advent Series”

Sermon 1: The Gift of Hope

Do you ever feel like Charlie Brown? In the midst of the Christmas decorations that have been up since Halloween, the Christmas songs stuck in your head, the lights and shopping and cookies and parties – do you ever want to just stand up and shout in exasperation like Charlie Brown, “Isn’t there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?!”

I’m sure you’ve seen the classic TV special *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. It’s been airing since 1965. That’s a pretty good run! Especially for a cartoon that was produced on a low budget and what was basically a last-minute production schedule for animation. It all came about when Coca-Cola came looking for a Christmas special to sponsor for holiday marketing. The cartoon *Peanuts* was wildly popular, so they asked for a meeting and ideas. *Peanuts* creator Charles Schulz and the producers threw together an outline in a day, and the Coke execs went for it. Schulz had some unorthodox ideas, like a jazz soundtrack and no laugh track, which was a staple of TV shows in that era. Most of all, he was adamant that the true Christmas story be presented, complete with a scene read straight from the Bible. The TV producers worried that it would be too controversial to read the Bible on national television, but Schulz insisted. Controversial or not, you could say the show has done pretty well.

And you’ve probably seen it a time or two. If so, you know that Charlie Brown is surrounded by all the trappings of Christmas, but they all come up empty. When

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he wonders aloud what Christmas is really about, his best friend Linus sets him straight with a clear answer straight from Luke 2:8–14. Linus recites the passage in one of the most poignant scenes in television history:

And there were in the same county 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. 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; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. 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. (KJV)

In those words, Charlie Brown finds hope. It's where the whole Christmas experience turns for him and good ol' Chuck realizes the true meaning of Christmas. He goes from depressed by the season to inspired by it. He goes from an inward focus of questioning to an outward focus of sharing the season with others.

Today I invite you to hear the same words of hope as we enter the season of Advent in expectation for Christmas. Over the next four weeks, we will unwrap the gifts of Christmas as we journey through the Advent season. It is our chance

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to listen to the stories, to remember the true meaning of Christmas, to wait in expectation for the arrival of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. The point is not to get rid of the trappings and traditions and celebrations all around us but to take a purposeful journey through them to more deeply experience the gifts of Christmas: hope, love, peace, and joy.

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