

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi
Deo Volente
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church
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“The Ghost of Christmas Present”
December 19, 2021
(LUKE 1:39-56)

The Ghost of Christmas Present represents generosity and good will. He shows Scrooge scenes of people sharing what they have with each other, even if they have very little. This Ghost seeks to show Scrooge that the true meaning of Christmas is found in the joy that comes from giving to others and celebrating together.

A conversation took place between a rabbi, and minister about what they do during Christmas celebrations. The minister explained that he gathered with his family on Christmas day for dinner joined hands and gave thanks to God for Christ and all the blessings they received because of Christmas.

"We do it a little differently," the rabbi said. "On Christmas morning my entire family goes to my brother's department store. We look at all the empty shelves, and then we all join hands and sing, 'What a friend we have in Jesus.'"

From the very beginning, the birth of Christ, was meant to be first and foremost a blessed event. The word "blessing" does not quite fit the theme of Christmas. Traditionally, we greet each other at this time of the year "Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year," or "Happy Christmas".

Christmas for many today is nothing more than just an excuse for another party, a vacation, and reunion. And yet, after the angel Gabriel had announced God's "blessings/greetings" to Mary upon the news of her son Jesus; Elizabeth, who was filled with the Holy Spirit, used the word "blessed" a few times to describe her cousin Mary and her child

And ever since that moment Christmas was meant to be a blessed time.

Just like the Ghost of Christmas Present was trying to show Scrooge the blessings of Christmas, Gabriel and Elizabeth were declaring the importance of deciding to **be a channel of blessing.** *9 At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40 where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women..."*

In this passage the Greek word "eulogeo" is used to describe Mary's blessing. It is an unusual word to use because that word is the word we use in English for "eulogy." Gabriel was eulogizing her while she was still alive.

As we know to eulogize someone is not merely to talk in a general way about the person but to speak highly of the person – normally at a funeral. Now, it doesn't surprise me that when Mary was being eulogized – praised – she was a little confused. The fact was he and Elizabeth were both trying to be an encouragement to Mary.

Being a channel of blessing involves being an encouragement. With all the difficult and dire news we have been hearing on the Television and in the Newspapers we surely need to be channels of blessings.

There was a man who was in a hurry to grab some last minute Christmas gifts. He looked at all the people and grumbled to myself. "I will be in here forever, and I just have so much to do." Christmas was beginning to become such a drag. He kind of wished that he could just sleep through Christmas. Once again he kind of mumbled to himself at the prices of all these toys. And wondered if the grandkids would even play with them. He found myself in the doll aisle. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a little boy about 5 holding a lovely doll. He kept touching her hair, and he held her so gently. He could not seem to help myself. He just kept looking over at the little boy and wondered who the doll was for. He watched him turn to a woman, and he called his aunt by name and said, "Are you sure I don't have enough money?" She replied a bit impatiently, "You know that you don't have enough money for it." The aunt told the little boy not to go anywhere that she had to go get some other things and would be back in a few minutes. And then she left the aisle. The boy continued to hold the doll. After a bit the man asked the boy who the doll was for. He said, "It is the doll my sister wanted so badly for Christmas. She just knew that Santa would bring it." The man told him that Santa would most likely bring it. He said "No, Santa can't go where my sister is...I have to give the doll to my Mamma to take to her".

He asked him where his sister was. He looked at him with the saddest eyes and said "She has gone to be with Jesus. My Daddy says that Mama is going to have to go be with her." His heart nearly stopped beating. The boy looked at him again and said, "I told my Daddy to tell Mama not to go yet. I told him to tell her to wait till I got back from the store". Then he asked the man if I wanted to see his picture. He told him he would love to. He pulled out some pictures he'd had taken at the front of the store. He said "I want my Mamma to take this with her so she doesn't ever forget me. I love my Mama so very much, and I wish she didn't have to leave me. But Daddy says she will need to be with my sister."

He saw that the little boy had lowered his head and had grown so very quiet. While he was not looking he reached into wallet and pulled out a handful of bills. He asked the little boy, "Shall we count that money one more time?" He grew excited and said "Yes, I just know it has to be enough." So, he slipped my money in with his and we began to count it. Of course it was plenty for the doll. He softly said, "Thank you Jesus for giving me enough money." Then the boy said, "I just asked Jesus to give me enough money to buy this doll so Mama can take it with her to give to my sister. And He heard my prayer. I wanted to ask Him for enough to buy my Mama a white rose, but I didn't ask Him, but He gave me enough to buy the doll and a rose for my Mama. She loves white roses so very, very much".

In a few minutes the aunt came back and he wheeled his cart away. He could not keep from thinking about the little boy as he finished his shopping in a totally different spirit than when he had started. And he kept remembering a story he had seen in the newspaper several days earlier about a drunk driver hitting a car and killing a little girl, and the Mother was in serious condition. The family was deciding on whether to remove the life support.

Two days later he read in the paper where the family had disconnected the life support and the young woman had died. I could not forget the little boy, wondering if the two were somehow connected. Later that day, he could not help himself. He went out and bought some white roses and took them to the funeral home where the young woman was. And there she was holding a lovely white rose, the beautiful doll, and the picture of the little boy in the store.

It doesn't take much to make a difference to be a channel of blessing. It just takes the will to do it.

Just like the Ghost of Christmas Present was trying to show Scrooge the blessings of Christmas, Gabriel and Elizabeth were declaring the importance of deciding to be a channel of blessing and also **be a catalyst of hope** *“blessed is the child you will bear! 43 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!” 46 And Mary said: “My soul magnifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.*

Gabriel's assurance and announcement to Mary did nothing to convince her or calm her confusion; instead she sought out her cousin Elizabeth to ease her mind and calm her spirit. Elizabeth's said, “Blessed is the child you will bear!” She became, for Mary, a catalyst for hope.

Christmas is at its very essence about being a catalyst of hope to those who feel hopeless and helpless. It is about lifting people up when they are down.

Over fifty years ago, on June 18, 1956, a freak accident happened on a lake in New York. A speeding motorboat bounced on a wave and shot into the water two of its passengers, a 50-year old man and a little girl. To keep her from drowning, the man held her head above water while the boat circled back. They rescued the girl. But the man sank and drowned.

That's how Dawson Trotman died, the founder of the Navigators, an international discipleship ministry. According to a quote in Time Magazine, “He lived to save others. His death was just the way he would have planned it.”[1] I read somewhere that his obituary reads like this: “Dawson Trotman, always lifting someone up.”

In the Greek, the word “encourage” means “to call to one's side, to comfort, to console, to strengthen, to uplift.” That is what Elizabeth was doing not only for Mary but for all of us. Christmas is about being a channel of blessing and a catalyst of hope.

Elizabeth also, was at that time **a chaperon of faith**. *From now on all generations will call me blessed,⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. ⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. ⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. ⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful ⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.”⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.*

Years ago, there was a very wealthy man who, with his devoted young son, shared a passion for art collecting. Together they traveled around the world, adding only the finest art treasures to their collection. Priceless works by Picasso, Van Gogh, Monet, and many others adorned the walls of their family estate. The widowed elderly man looked on with satisfaction as his only child became an experienced art collector. The son's trained eye and sharp business mind caused his father to beam with pride as they dealt with art collectors around the world.

As winter approached, war engulfed their nation, and the young man left to serve his country. After only a few short weeks, the elderly man received a telegram that his beloved son

was missing in action. The art collector anxiously awaited more news, fearing he would never see his son again. Within days his fears were confirmed. The young man had died while rushing a fellow soldier to a medic. Distraught and lonely, the old man faced the upcoming Christmas holidays with anguish and sadness.

The joy of the season—a season that he and his son had so looked forward to in the past—would visit his house no longer. On Christmas morning, a knock on the door awakened the depressed old man. As he walked to the door, the masterpieces of art on the walls only reminded him that his son was not coming home. He opened the door and was greeted by a soldier with a large package in his hand.

The soldier introduced himself to the old man by saying, "I was a friend of your son. I was the one he was rescuing when he died. May I come in for a few moments? I have something to show you." As the two began to talk, the soldier told of how the man's son had told every one of his—and his father's—love of fine art work. "I'm also an artist," said the soldier, "and I want to give you this." As the old man began to unwrap the package, paper gave way to reveal a portrait of the man's son.

Though the world would never consider it a work of genius, the painting featured the young man's face in striking detail. Overcome with emotion, the old man thanked the soldier, promising to hang the portrait above the fireplace. A few hours later, after the soldier had departed, the old man set about his task. True to his word, the painting went above the fireplace, pushing aside thousands of dollars' worth of paintings.

And then the old man sat in his chair and spent Christmas gazing at the gift he had been given. During the days and weeks that followed, the man learned that his son had rescued dozens of wounded soldiers before a bullet stilled his caring heart. As the stories of his son's gallantry continued to reach him, fatherly pride and satisfaction began to ease his grief, as he realized that, although his son was no longer with him, the boy's life would live on because of those he had touched. The painting of his son soon became his most prized possession, far eclipsing any interest in the priceless pieces for which museums around the world clamored.

He told his neighbors it was the greatest gift he had ever received. The following spring, the old man became ill and passed away. The art world was in anticipation, since, with the old man's passing, and his only son dead, those paintings would be sold at an auction. According to the will of the old man, all of the art works would be auctioned on Christmas Day, the way he had received his greatest gift. The day finally arrived and art collectors from around the world gathered to bid on some of the world's most spectacular paintings.

Dreams could be fulfilled this day; greatness could be achieved as some could say, "I have the greatest collection." The auction began with a painting that was not on any museum list... It was the painting of the old man's son. The auctioneer asked for an opening bid, but the room was silent.

"Who will open the bidding with \$100?" he asked. Moments passed as no one spoke. From the back of the room came, "Who cares about that painting? It's just a picture of his son. Let's forget it and get on to the good ones." More voices echoed in agreement. "No, we have to sell this one—first," replied the auctioneer. "Now who will take the son?"

Finally, a friend of the old man spoke. "Will you take \$10 for the painting? That's all I have. "Will anyone go higher?" called the auctioneer. After more silence he said, "Going once, going twice... Gone!" The gavel fell. Cheers filled the room and someone shouted; "Now we can get on with it and bid on these treasures!"

The auctioneer looked at the audience and announced that the auction was over. Stunned disbelief quieted the room. Then someone spoke up and asked, "What do you mean it's over? We didn't come here for a portrait of some old man's son! What about all of the other paintings? There are millions of dollars' worth of art work here. We demand an explanation!"

The auctioneer replied, "It's very simple. According to the will of the father, whoever takes the son...gets it all."

"He came to His own, but His own received Him not. But to whoever does receive Him; that believes on His Name – He gives the power to become the children of God.

Listen. The message of Christmas is the same. Whoever takes the Son gets it all. You think about that. Amen.