



Everything You Ever Needed



A Sermon By

The Rev. Andrew W. Walter

The Feast of the Nativity
December 24, 2015

Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

An audio version of this sermon is available at
<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/2015-12-24-AWW.mp3>.

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Luke 2:1-20

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But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. (Luke 2:10)

This time last year, my wife, our three boys and I started a new tradition. Rather than buying presents for everyone in the family, we each picked one name out of a hat, and we were responsible for getting that person's gifts. To keep it fair, we set very specific parameters: how much money to spend; you had to buy gifts and stocking stuffers; and, most important, there was no asking Mom to help.

At first, the boys were not thrilled with the whole idea. Even though they are young adults, they thought they might not get as much stuff as they usually did, but in the end, by the time Christmas morning came, they loved the new tradition. They liked taking some time and being thoughtful about what to get for their person.

For me, the best part came at the beginning of the process, when we actually picked our names. It was the last day of Thanksgiving vacation, just before the boys headed back to school and to work. We had a breakfast together, and as we sat around the table, we took turns reaching into a bowl to pull out our name. Everyone had their best poker face on, not wanting to reveal whose name they had, and we just kept laughing and laughing. When the last person had gone, our son James, who gets the holiday spirit like no one else, said: "Okay, what do you want?" And so, we took some time going around the table, each person sharing what they wanted for Christmas.

What do you want for Christmas? It is a question we hear a lot in the lead up to tomorrow. We ask our friends and family, children and grandchildren, and people ask us, as well. This past Sunday, it was my favorite question for all the kids who came to church. "Tell me, what is one thing you want for Christmas?"

Children are pretty smart, and it doesn't take them long to figure Christmas out. Before you know it, they don't wait for people to ask anymore, they just start producing Christmas lists, pages and pages of things they want, and every year, the list comes earlier and earlier. I remember one time, it was just after Labor Day, when my wife and I received an email from one of our boys. The subject line was: *What I Want for Christmas*; and the email said:

Beatles Rock Band. Please get it.

Knowing what our loved ones want, and getting those things for them, is so much a part of Christmas, but tonight, I want to know something else. I am not going to ask you what you want. I am going to ask you another, deeper, and more personal question:

What do you NEED this Christmas?

I think we all know there is big a difference in life between what we want and what we need. Most of us want to have a nice house and a good car. We want to have clothes that aren't out-of-style. We want to have money in the bank, so we can buy the latest cell phone or tablet or large screen, high definition television. These things means so much to us that we tell ourselves we need them. We go to our spouse or partner and say, "Honey, I need a new..." fill in the blank.

But, our needs go far beyond material items. Needs are what we require to live and thrive. Certainly, we have some material needs, but we also have emotional needs and spiritual needs. We need human interaction and connection. We need a sense of belonging. We need to be seen and heard and valued for who we are. We need meaning and purpose, an understanding of why we are here, and most of all, we need to be loved. All of us need to feel loved.

Unfortunately, our human wants have a way of overshadowing, and even supplanting, our true needs. We believe if we get what we want we will be really happy, so we put all of our time and attention into getting what we want, while we ignore what we really need. Oftentimes, we don't even realize what we need, until we wake up one day with a feeling something just isn't right.

I think of Mary and Joseph reaching the outskirts of Bethlehem. They had been travelling for days, probably over a week, walking something 80 miles with Mary nine months pregnant. They were hungry and tired. It was the middle of the night, and all they wanted was a room at the inn, a place that was clean and warm and dry. Mary was about to give birth, and you know Joseph wanted to find her a comfortable spot for the physical ordeal she was about to undergo.

Deep in their hearts, they were both anxious, not only about what was going to happen in the next few hours, but also about how they arrived at this point. Nine months earlier, Mary learned she was pregnant, and when she told Joseph, he didn't take it well. Both of them had visions of an angel, telling them it would be all right; "This baby is from God," the angel said, and for a while, that lessened the strain. As they approached the city of Bethlehem, though, and it came time for Mary to give birth, all of the questions came flooding back, and suddenly, the answers were not so clear. Doubts were swirling around

in their minds, and they didn't know what to believe. Everything about the future felt uncertain.

On the surface, all Mary and Joseph wanted was a room at the inn, but deep inside, they needed much more than that. Their lives seemed so surreal, like it was all just a dream, and they needed to believe again. They needed hope and strength and comfort. They needed faith and trust, in each other and in God. They needed to know the angel was real, and what the angel said was real. They needed to know this baby really was from God, everything would be okay, everything would work out alright.

We all have needs like that. We will never experience the same, exact circumstances as Mary and Joseph, but we know those feelings. We all have them at some point or another because they are part of the human experience.

Recently, I read an essay on social media that is attributed to Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple Computer. Although the words have never really been verified, the possibility they came from Steve Jobs, a man who had everything in the world you could want, is eye-opening. Apparently, he said:

I have come to the pinnacle of success in business. In the eyes of others, my life is an epitome of success. However, aside from work, I have little joy... Only now do I understand that you have to pursue objectives that are not related to wealth: love, relationships, art, dreams of younger days... This is the true wealth that will follow you; will accompany you, will give you strength and light to go ahead.

Everyone needs something. What do you need this Christmas?

Whatever it is, tonight is the night to ask for it, to pray for it, for behold, I bring you good news that will be for all people, for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a savior. Jesus will save you. Jesus is what you need. Jesus is the answer to all your prayers, and tonight, God gives him to you. God gives him to you because God loves you. No matter who you are or where you are from, God loves you. All you have to do is open your heart and let God in, and you will have everything you ever needed.

Amen.