

A  
MESSAGE OF HOPE,  
comfort and freedom in Jesus Christ

**“The Ultimate Gift” by Kyle Murphy**

For many households, this time of year is synonymous with gifts. That is true whether you are Christian, Muslim, Jewish, or otherwise. For those of us who are Christians, the Christmas season hopefully also brings to mind the ultimate gift – Jesus Christ. Although December 25<sup>th</sup> (Christmas Day) is not the actual date of His birth, we celebrate His birth and the ultimate gift we were given when God became flesh.

As a learning moment, let’s take a brief look at what the Bible has to say (or not say) about the specific date for the birth of Jesus Christ. While we are not told the date, the Bible does provide details about some of the events and activities taking place at the time of Jesus’s birth.

The registration. Shortly before Jesus was born, Caesar Augustus issued a decree ordering “all the inhabited earth to be registered.” Everyone had to register in “his own city,” which might have required a journey of a week or more. (Luke 2:1-3) That order – probably made to support taxation and military conscription – would have been unpopular at any time of year, but it is unlikely that Augustus would have provoked his subjects further by forcing many of them to make long trips during the cold winter.

The sheep. Shepherds were “living out of doors and keeping watches in the night over their flocks.” (Luke 2:8) The book *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus* notes that flocks lived in the open air from “the week before the Passover [late March]” through mid-November. It then adds: “They passed the winter under cover; and from this alone it may be seen that the traditional date for Christmas, in the winter, is unlikely to be right, since the Gospel says that the shepherds were in the fields.”

We can estimate when Jesus was born by counting backward from his death on Passover, Nisan 14 in the spring of the year 33 A.D. (John 19:14-16). Jesus was about 30 years old when he began his three-and-a-half-year ministry, so he was born approximately in the early fall of 2 B.C. (Luke 3:23).

So, why is Christmas on December 25? Since there is no evidence that the birth of Jesus Christ occurred on December 25, why is Christmas celebrated on this date? The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says that church leaders probably chose it “to coincide with the pagan Roman festival marking the ‘birthday of the unconquered sun,’” at the time of the winter solstice. According to *The Encyclopedia Americana*, many scholars believe that this was done “in order to make Christianity more meaningful to pagan converts.”

Whatever the reason, we can still celebrate the birth of Jesus and thank God for the ultimate gift offered to each of us! This is something we should really be doing every day of the year – not just on December 25<sup>th</sup> or during the Christmas season. Isn’t it true that God blesses us and showers us with gifts every day!

The Apostle John writes a great deal about this ultimate gift and the love shown to us in his gospel and epistles. Here are just a few of the verses:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1)

“And this is the testimony of God: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” (1 John 5:11)

What awesome news John shares here! What amazing promises and truths. It is in Jesus Christ that we find the way to eternal life. It is in Jesus Christ that we can be called children of God. It is Jesus Christ who is the ultimate gift!

The Apostle Paul also wrote quite a bit about this ultimate gift. One instance can be found in 2 Corinthians 9:15 where he writes, “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” In Ephesians 2:8 we read, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

In the Greek, the same word for grace is also used for gift. The Greek word *charis* (noun) is translated in English as “grace” or “gift” and *charizomai* (verb) as “to give a gift, forgive.” It is through the ultimate gift of Jesus Christ that we receive grace and forgiveness.

Paul had this to say as well. “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.” (1 Timothy 1:5-16)

Because of the ultimate gift of Jesus Christ, we are saved from our sins. Not only that, we are healed, restored, delivered, and made whole. Praise God for this ultimate gift!

Going back to Paul’s words to Timothy when he refers to himself as the worst of sinners, I can certainly relate. When I reflect on my life, my choices, my sinful thoughts and actions, I realize the immensity of my sin. It is in these moments of reflection that I begin to glimpse just how truly ultimate is the gift I was given. It brings me to tears at times – tears of joy and thankfulness – for the love God has shown to me and the sacrifice Jesus made for me. No gift I have ever received comes close in comparison to the grace God has shown me and the gift of Jesus Christ.

I pray you take some time over this next month to reflect on this as well and join me in thanking God for the grace He has shown and His ultimate gift, Jesus Christ. It is through Jesus that we are saved! What an amazing blessing!

I would also like to encourage those of you who haven’t taken hold of this gift to take some time to reflect. God offers His grace - this ultimate gift of salvation – to all. It is offered freely and is found in Jesus Christ. Confess your sins to Him, thank Him for His grace, and accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior! Commit your life to Him! How freeing it will be to step into the New Year as a new creation in Christ!



“The LORD bless you and keep you, the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

(Numbers 6:24-26; Romans 15:13 NIV)