

Christmas Signs

Hespeler, 24 December 2022 – 8pm Christmas Eve Service

Luke 2:8-14

There is a famous Christmas story, I'm sure you have heard it. It is called The Gift of the Magi by O Henry. It tells the story of a loving young couple who both want to give the perfect Christmas gift to their mate.

The husband decides that he wants to give these beautiful pure tortoise shell with jewelled rim combs that will compliment his wife's beautiful long hair. The wife, for her part, decides to give her husband a Platinum chain upon which to fasten the gold family heirloom pocket watch that he inherited from his father.

The Twist

The problem, of course, is that neither can afford to pay for these extravagant gifts. And so the wife decides to sell her hair to buy the chain, while the husband sells his watch to buy the combs. Both of them manage to give the gifts they want to, but at the cost of not being able to use the gifts that they receive.

It is a sweet little story about generous giving with a nice little humorous twist at the end. But it is perhaps a reminder that the gifts that we give can surely be a sign of our love. But then again, they can also be signs of other things, can't they?

Another Couple

There was a young couple who were spending their first Christmas together. And the husband wanted to give the perfect gift to his wife.

The young wife had an ambition. She wanted to go to school and become a doctor. She had the marks to do it. And had earned scholarships that would make it, if not exactly financially easy, at least possible.

But her young husband wasn't quite so sure about that. He was worried that if she pursued such a demanding degree, that she wouldn't be able to take care of him, that she wouldn't be the wife of his dreams anymore. He had been subtly trying to steer her towards a career that would demand less of her time and energy.

The Shopping Trip

And so he went shopping for a gift. After looking around all day, he had finally narrowed his choice down to two possibilities. One was a beautiful silk dress. He knew that this was just the kind of thing that would flatter her figure and appearance perfectly. She never really wore this kind of outfit, but he always just figured it was because she didn't want to spend the money. It was, you see, a designer dress and very expensive.

His other option was one that he really wasn't all that fond of. But he had heard her mention that it was something she really wanted. It was actually just an old used stethoscope. He found it in a second-hand shop so it wouldn't cost much, but he could actually tell that it was really well made. But the gift seemed cheap to him.

The Gift Becomes a Sign

So, what do you think? Two gifts. One really expensive and all about making her fit his idea of who she was supposed to be. The other kind of cheap, but it would actually show, not only that he actually listened to her, but that he was willing to support what she really wanted.

And you probably have an idea which gift he ought to get. But I actually wanted to underline something else. Each gift would be a sign, wouldn't it? Whichever he chose, it would be a sign about the health of their relationship and of where it might be going. And, honestly, the really expensive gift would probably be a bad sign, while the cheaper one might actually be a sign of hope for the future. So, you see, a gift can be a sign.

A Birth in an Odd Circumstance

And the angel said to the shepherds, **"This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."** So, you see, a gift can be a sign. And that sign is not just about God



sending his own son to save us, it is about the form in which that gift is given.

I know that many people have told stories and given sermons about the Christmas story down through the years. They offer various explanations for why Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem and for why it was that, when it came time for the child to be born, there was no room for the family and they had to lay the boy in a manger and wrap him in bands of cloth. But the author of this gospel does not really offer any explanation for it. He just says that this is what happened, he doesn't say why.

The Explanation

No wait, that's not quite right. He does offer one explanation. He says that all of it happened in precisely this way because it was a sign. It was a sign that the Saviour was born for a bunch of crude shepherds. It was a sign that the gift that was given was given with a deep understanding of people who struggle to find shelter or to put food on the table. It was a sign that the gift was given by a God who understands both the aspirations we carry in our hearts and the barriers we struggle to overcome to get there. It was a sign of the true nature of the gift.

That gift is a sign for you tonight.