

# The Messengers of God

## *Christmas Gifts:*

Luke 1:76-79, 2:8-15

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Christmas gift shopping is high on my personal agenda. I thought I had settled an important piece of it – I was even gloating – until I realized that ample time had passed and no package had arrived. I've had problems with a local retailer due to incompetence; but when this internet retailer failed to answer three of my emails and an internet search revealed many angry customers with the same fate, I began to wonder if I was a victim of a scam. When I checked prices and found them reasonable, I believed the retailer's message that they would deliver the package. I was wrong and am now more wary of messages and messengers.

When our expectations go unfulfilled, we lose trust and become apprehensive. We all want to limit our losses; but it is impossible to eliminate loss. To live we must trust... and trust is spelled, R-I-S-K, risk. You cannot climb in a car, walk on a bridge, or eat a sandwich without trusting someone who you don't know. My uncle once trusted the messages he heard about a particular type of American-made car. He purchased one. Later after so many problems and much research, he warned me to never buy a car manufactured on a Monday following the 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday weekend. If I believe my uncle's message and follow the calendar, I can safely buy new cars again once the 2008 models are gone, when 2011 models are available.

Obviously, we sometimes believe messengers that aren't truthful. However, one of the great gifts of Christmas is that there are messengers from heaven. Turn to Luke 1:67 (page 781

in the Pew Bible). This passage recounts the circumcision ceremony of John the Baptist. It was the day of his naming. When John's father wrote that his name is John, his voice returned for the first time in at least nine months. We read about the awe people felt and these words follow:

***Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy...*** (Luke 1:67, NLT)

Prophecy is not so much *foretelling* as it *forth-telling*. It is not so much about prediction as it is bringing forth God's message. Most of Zechariah's prophecy was not prediction, but some of it was. Look at verse 76 and 77:

***And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord. You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins.*** (Luke 1:76-77, NLT)

The prediction is that John the Baptist will be a prophet or a messenger of God, that that he will prepare the way for the Lord to come, and that as a prophet, instead of predicting all kinds of things, he will tell forth or explain to people how to find salvation. John the Baptist is a messenger of God, a prophet who brings God's message forth.

Unfortunately, some people were very wary and did not believe him. *Turn to Mark 11:30 (page 772)*. In this text, Jesus finds himself trapped by a question. He really doesn't want to answer, so he appeals to his inquirers' fairness. If they want him to answer their question, they'll have to answer his question. He springs it:

***Did John's authority to baptize come from heaven, or was it merely human?***  
(Mark 11:30, NLT)

He's asking if John was a prophet, a messenger of God. You can read their response. They were in a trap because the people believed John was a prophet and they didn't.

Why did the people accept John as a messenger of God, and why did the religious leaders reject him? That answer is given throughout the entire New Testament. It is illustrated when the

leaders see themselves as shepherds but Jesus sees their followers as sheep without a shepherd. It is shown in Luke 2:8-17 (page 782) when shepherds receive the message from angels in verses 9 through 14 and become messengers themselves in verse 17, not because they are respected by others, not because they are schooled in the Scriptures, not because they feel good about their conformity to the Scriptures, but because of their encounter with the Lord, which is what they call it in verse 15. They say:

***Let's see this wonderful thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.*** (Luke 2:15, NLT)

The answer to why the people accepted John and the leaders rejected him is given in the New Testament when we observe people seeking a relationship with God rather than relying upon their conscience that they are okay. The religious leaders relied upon their logic and taught whatever they concluded. The shepherds told of their encounter with angels and the validation of the angel's message; and though they drew conclusions, their witness to these encounters was prophetic; it was a message from God. The messengers from God in Luke 2:9 and 14 were the angels, and in verse 17 they were the shepherds.

The Bible tells us that the faith God looks for isn't just the acceptance of facts. That becomes so clear if you read Hebrews chapter 11. You can turn to Hebrews 11 (page 941). In this chapter, God gives us a definition of faith and then illustrates it through the actions of so many different characters. In Hebrews 11:6 we read this:

***So, you see, it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that there is a God and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.*** (Hebrews 11:6, NLT)

The only reward that fulfills someone seeking God is an encounter or relationship with God that satisfies that search. Jesus promised his disciples that they would have an ongoing

relationship with him and thus God through the Holy Spirit. He told them (in Acts 1:8) that after the Holy Spirit came upon them, they would receive power and be his witnesses. A witness is a messenger, isn't it? A witness of God is a messenger of God. Please turn to the book of Acts, chapter two (page 836). When the Holy Spirit came on those first followers, Peter spoke as a messenger of God. He spoke as a prophet telling the crowds that gathered what God was doing in their midst. He quoted a predictive prophesy which we can read beginning with verse 17.

Let's read this passage together aloud.

***In the last days, God says, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants—men and women alike—and they will prophesy."*** (Acts 2:17-18, NLT)

"I will pour out my Spirit upon" whom? All people! Who will prophesy? Your sons and daughters! Who will see visions? Your young men! Who will dream dreams? Your old men! Who will receive the Spirit and prophesy? Men and women alike! Who then become the messengers of God to this world? Everyone who has a personal relationship with God through the Spirit of Jesus! We join the angels. We join them as messengers. We join them in exclaiming, "*Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to all whom God favors.*"

Have you embraced your Christmas gift from God and become God's messenger? It's not the same thing as a teacher. A messenger is a witness to what God is saying. It is prophecy. It is sharing your experience of God. If you can't share your experience, then maybe you are crippled with fear or unbelief. Maybe, you admire Jesus' from afar, but have yet to feel the joy of his forgiveness and companionship. God wants to change that right now. Are you ready for that change?