

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Undeserved

First-time parents want to get everything just right for their baby. Did you ever notice that? With baby number one, parents are reading the books, researching diapers, making sure the pacifier is sterilized before it goes in baby's mouth. But by baby number three or four, the kid can be eating food off the floor, and mom will say, "It'll just strengthen his immune system."

But with the first child, parents are extra careful to get everything just right. And I'm sure Mary and Joseph were, too. Even more so! Because the baby that the virgin Mary was expecting wasn't just her firstborn son. He was God's Son! True God, coming to be her Savior. So you can imagine that Mary and step-dad Joseph had everything ready to give him the welcome into the world that he deserved – cradle for him to sleep in, stack of best diapers they could afford.

How frustrating it must have been, then, when Caesar decreed his census. Everyone back to their home town to be counted, and pregnant moms were no exception. Looks like Jesus would be born on the road, away from comfort of home. Not only that, 9 months pregnant, she's gotta travel 90 miles to Bethlehem. That's not good for mom, or baby. As the baby bounced in her belly for 90 miles, you gotta think she'd be saying to herself, "He deserves better than this!"

But it only got worse. When they get to Bethlehem, all the hotels are booked. All they can find is a guy who says, "Well, there's a shed out back where I keep my cows..." Can you imagine? As Joseph is doing his best to clean a spot on the floor covered in who knows what for Mary to give birth, he's gotta be thinking, "God's Son deserves better than this." And when he's born, they wrap him in cloth, and lay him in a manger...know what that is? It's a feed trough! Would you lay your baby where cows have slobbered? Jesus deserves better than this!

What the kids shared with you today looks so cute, cuddly, and clean...but what really happened that first Christmas was so lowly, messy, downright dirty. This is how God comes into the world? A palace, golden cradle, surrounded by kings would be far too little for him! And he gets a barn, a feed trough, surrounded by animals. The whole scene leaves you saying, "He deserves better than this!" And he does!

But it had to be like that. It wasn't what Mary and Joseph wanted, but it was what God wanted. God had to come into this world in such a lowly way...because of us. He had to come precisely because you and I don't give him what he deserves. You ever think about that: What God deserves from us, and what we actually give him? He created us – he deserves everything! He deserves #1 place in our hearts and lives. But so often he comes after our own personal agenda. He deserves all honor and glory, but I'm more often concerned with my own glory, not his. He deserves perfect obedience, life lived to serve him and others, and I'm more interested in serving myself. What we give God is far, far less than he deserves. And what we deserve because of it is his punishment, now and forever.

But friends, that's why the lowly birth of Jesus is such good news. God is showing us that Jesus didn't come into this world to get what he deserved. If God was all about getting what he deserved, he never would have left his throne in heaven! And it's not about giving us what we deserve. The shepherds thought that at first – they saw an angel of the Lord, and they were terrified! But what did he say to them? **Don't be afraid! I bring you good news of great joy...today, a Savior is born to you.** Jesus didn't come to get what he deserved, or give us what we deserved – he came to save. He came to rescue us from what our sins deserve, and to give us what we don't deserve.

That's why he came as a lowly human being: Because he had to die. The only way a holy God could save us from what we deserve is by giving what we deserve to another. And so the Son of God was born the lowly son of Mary. And because he loved you, one day that baby in a wooden feedbox would be nailed to a wooden cross for you. And there, God laid your sins on Jesus and gave him the punishment you deserved. And for Jesus' sake, God now gives you precious gifts you don't deserve: For your sins, forgiveness; instead of punishment, peace with God; in place of death, he gives you life with him in heaven.

You could summarize Christmas, as well as God's whole relationship with us, in one word: Undeserved. Jesus bore humility he didn't deserve and died a death he didn't deserve so that he could give us precious gifts we don't deserve.

And those gifts are for you, personally. I love what the angel said to the shepherds: **A Savior has been born to you.** Did you ever stop and ask – why shepherds? Shepherds in those days were the lowest class. They had a dirty, smelly profession. They were nobodies. Why not send the angels to Caesar in Rome, or the high priest in Jerusalem?

God sent the angels to lowly nobodies...so that you know this message is for everybody. That God says it to you, personally: **A Savior has been born to you.** No matter how low your class, no matter how dirty your past, there's a place at the manger just for you. A Savior born for you, died for you, gives forgiveness and heaven to you, personally.

Such undeserved love and undeserved gifts! Jesus is certainly a Savior worthy of our hearts highest love and our life's highest praise. May we give it, this Christmas and always. Amen.