

THE BIG IDEA: The promise of Christmas is God's presence with us more than God's presents to us.

The Take-Off

There is perhaps no season that embraces the concept of "home" like the Christmas season.

We watch Hallmark movies about homecomings, ASCAP just named "I'll Be Home for Christmas" the 10th most popular Christmas song of the last century, and family reunions (unless you have a REALLY crazy uncle) can melt the heart. This past year, Air Canada took full advantage of the warmth of Christmas when they surprised some Canadians with a very unique Christmas gift.

[Video - Air Canada round trip tickets]

We love reunions! We love the concept of saying hello.

Adele broke records by selling 1.11 million downloads in one week of her song by that name, and here in Luke 2, we find God saying "hello," too.

This morning we'll find that God's hello is better than Adele's

It's possible that you're thinking that "Adele" is a computer, but Adele is a pop singer who's doing ok for herself!

Her hit song, "Hello," is actually more like a good-bye, because it's a song about a past relationship that is now distant and - even though she calls - remains distant.

But here, in Luke 2, the holy God is going to say "hello" to a fallen humanity, and his hello is better because it's going to lead to reconciliation.

God's hello isn't a sad, tragic song.

It's the beginning of his redemptive story, and it starts in a small town of somewhere between 300 and 1000 people.

Good news can come to - and through - small towns, and that's great news for us here in Albemarle.

Adele's hello is from a distance, but God's hello eradicated the distance, and that's why his hello is better.

One of the names of Jesus - Emmanuel - means "God with us" and that's the most important part of this story.

The presence of God among us.

God came to be with man so that men could in turn be with God.

In a season of stress as we try to find the perfect presents, I pray that the presence of God in Jesus will come to be, for you, the greatest gift of all.

I'm not denying that God gives us good gifts, but this week's Big Idea reflects what we learn in Luke 2: The promise of Christmas is God's presence with us more than God's presents to us.

God with us. The gift of God's presence.

And here are 10 things we find in Luke 2 that come with the presence of God.

1. Light (v. 9)

- a. The shepherds were on a hillside at night, and it was dark
- b. Not sure if you are or ever have been afraid of the dark, but God has an answer for that
- c. He shone light everywhere!
- d. John 1:5 - light can't be overcome
- e. John 8:12 - not just light in the sky, but THE LIGHT was coming
- f. God's presence brings light, and darkness - and the fear of it - has to go

2. Good news (vv. 10-11)

- a. The first thing God says after 400 years of silence was something good to hear
- b. It's hard to be a person of God's presence and be pessimistic - his presence accompanies good news
- c. Good news from God's perspective: he was coming to redeem and rescue us

3. Signs (v. 12)

- a. Sometimes we think that the presence of God is this ethereal, hard to explain or verify thing
- b. But the angels said that there would be a sign for them to confirm the presence of God
- c. Following Jesus, allowing his presence in our lives, will bring visible, verifiable signs (Mark 16:17)
- d. The lack of signs probably says more about our unbelief than God's power
- e. God cannot show up without being seen

4. Glory (v. 14)

- a. This is a perfect one to follow signs, because most of us are skittish about signs because of how others have abused them - how they've made signs become all about them
- b. But the presence of God ALWAYS reveals the glory of God - not the glory of man
- c. The more visible God's presence is in our lives, the less visible we'll actually be
- d. Matthew 5:16 - we do the signs and God gets the glory!

5. Movement (v. 15)

- a. What were the first 2 words from the shepherds after the glory show? "Let's go..."
- b. When God's presence is in our lives, we become doers, seekers of Jesus (and we're pretty motivated about it, too - they went "quickly" - v. 16)

6. Evangelism (v. 17)

- a. One of the things we'll do when we have the presence of God is tell others about it
- b. "When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning him..."
- c. 1 John 1:1

7. Awe (v. 18)

- a. The presence of God in our lives will result in the awe of God, but not from just us
- b. From those we tell, from those who are watching
- c. The church may be a lot of things to the world, but boring isn't one of them when God's presence is here

8. Reflection (v. 19)

- a. Mary's response to the presence of God in Jesus was different than the shepherds
- b. They moved, but she sat. They told, but she pondered.
- c. She exhibited Psalm 46:10
- d. How much do you think about what God? Psalm 1:2 describes what this looks like for us.

9. Worship (v. 20)

- a. What's the expected response to mediating on God and his law? Worship!
- b. The shepherds went back praising God! We will, too!

10. Transformation (v. 20)

- a. Finally, at the end of the day, the shepherds returned. But to what? To shepherding!
- b. But do you think they were ever the same again? Not likely.
- c. The presence of God in our lives changes our lives. It transforms the things we naturally do into opportunities for God to do what only he can do supernaturally.

The Landing

Let me re-emphasize that all these characteristics become evident in our lives when we value the presence of God more than the presents of God.

Presents are nice, but they aren't nicer than presence.

In fact, many of us here would give back gifts from loved ones in order to have time with loved ones.

Here's one last video to drive that home.

[Military reunions]

The promise of Christmas is God's presence with us more than God's presents to us.

God understood that, which is why God didn't UPS redemption; he hand delivered it.

He wants to deliver it to you today.

Let's pray.