

# He Gave His Only Son

The True Meaning of Christmas Series, December 10 & 11, 2022 | John 3:16 (Psalm 148)  
Rob O'Neal, Senior Pastor

How will we get closer to the true meaning of Christmas?

**Christmas movies are everywhere, but do they get us closer to the true meaning of Christmas?**

The Hallmark Channel started its "Countdown to Christmas" in 2009. "Countdown to Christmas" is a series of movies and specials leading up to the holiday. Many of them are romantic and celebrate small towns, generosity, togetherness, and wholesomeness.

"Countdown to Christmas" has been so popular that it has started earlier and earlier each year. At one point it started in October, before Halloween!

This year, it seems, every streaming service is in on the game.

Apparently, many people are longing for hope and wholesomeness in entertainment.

But Christmas is more than small-town life, togetherness, and happy endings.

**John 3:16 does a much better job of getting at the true meaning of Christmas.**

John 3:16 doesn't contain the familiar plot surrounding Jesus' birth.

However, John 3:16 tells us why Christmas happened and what Christmas produces.

So, John 3:16 helps us understand the true meaning of Christmas.

**Last week we began our journey by looking at the opening, "For God so loved the world ..."**

We said that we need a robust concept of God. He is our Immanent Friend, Almighty King, Righteous Judge, and Transcendent Power.

We also said that we need a realistic understanding of the world. The world is created by God, it is the place where we live, it is filled with sin, and it is in open rebellion against God.

So, there is a dilemma: How will God respond to the world?

Godly love is the answer. That's where we ended last week. This week we pick up and ask what that godly love looks like as we seek to understand the true meaning of Christmas.

**This week we will move Four Steps Closer to the True Meaning of Christmas.**

We will look at the next part of John 3:16. It starts, "For God so loved the world." Then it continues, "... that he gave his only Son."

This week we will analyze the identity of the Son, we will acknowledge his unique origin, we will appreciate the magnitude of God's giving, and we will explore the joy of getting.

We will take four steps toward understanding the true meaning of Christmas.

**Step One: Let's analyze the identity of the Son.**

**The Son is not just one child.**

Jesus is THE Son and not just another son or daughter. This can be a little bit confusing.

When you or I become disciples of Jesus, God adopts us as his children. When I accepted Jesus' offer of forgiveness, I was also made new and adopted as a child of God, a son of God.

So, the fact that you may be a son or daughter of God, yet Jesus is THE Son of God can be confusing. Jesus is like our older brother. However, we are not entirely like Jesus; Jesus is different from us.

The Gospel according to John makes it clear. John calls Jesus "THE Son." Then John calls us "children." You see us called children in **John 1:12-13**:

***But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.***

Son is more specific than child is both the English and the Greek versions of the New Testament.

We are children of God. Jesus is THE Son. Jesus has a special place in God's plan.

### **The Son is one with the Father.**

In **Mark 9:7** Jesus was on what we call the Mount of Transfiguration with a handful of his disciples. Jesus became radiant with divine glory and power. The cloud of God's glory surrounded them, and the Heavenly Father affirmed his Son:

***And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."***

Jesus explained the close nature of his relationship with the Father in John 5:19:

***So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise."***

This Father-Son relationship includes mutual love, cooperation, and imitation, but it goes further. **John 1:18** explains that whoever has seen Jesus has seen God, that is, the Father:

***No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.***

Jesus and the Father are one.

### **The Son is the one God sends.**

In **1 John 4:9** we get this truth stated simply:

***In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.***

In godly love, God the Father sent God the Son into the world.

We even get the purpose at the end: God the Father sent God the Son into the world so that we (the disciples of Jesus) might live.

Jesus is THE Son. He is one with the Father and sent by the Father.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only **Son**..."

We need to know who Jesus is.

## **Step Two: Let's acknowledge the unique origin of Jesus.**

**"Monogenaes"** is a Greek term that is translated multiple ways in **John 3:16**.

Here's what it looks like in Greek: μονογενής and transliterated into English: "monogenaes". The term "monogenaes" is the term translated between "his" and "Son" in John 3:16. The English Standard Version translates "monogenaes" as "only" producing "his only Son." The New International Version and others translate the phrase as "his one and only Son." The King James Version and others translate it as "His only begotten Son." "One," "one and only," and "only begotten" all try to capture the meaning of "monogenaes." How does this term help us to understand the unique origin of Jesus?

### **"Monogenaes" gets used multiple times in the New Testament, especially in John's writings.**

Sometimes "monogenaes" simply refers to a parent's only child. However, for John, "monogenaes" applied to Jesus seems to be saying something more. In **John 1:14** we read that Jesus is the "monogenaes" Son from the Father:

***And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.***

In **1 John 4:9** again we discover that it is God's "monogenaes" Son he sent into the world and that we might live through him:

***In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.***

Jesus is the only, the one and only, the only-begotten Son of the Father. He reveals God's glory, he is full of grace and truth, and we live through him. His origin is unique.

### **Jesus' unique origin is eternal.**

**John 1:1** makes clear that Jesus existed before the beginning, before anything else:

***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.***

In **Revelation 22:13**, Jesus himself claims to be the beginning and the end itself:

***"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."***

In **Colossians 1:17**, Paul tells us that Jesus is before all things:

***And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.***

There is never a time or point in eternity when Jesus was not. He is eternal.

### **Jesus' unique origin was a doctrine that Athanasius of Alexandria fought to defend.**

Athanasius was an important theologian in the fourth century.

He lived when the persecutions of Christians were ending and when the Roman Emperor Constantine was first accepting, then establishing, the Christian faith across the empire.

Athanasius became concerned with the theology of a priest named Arius. Arius taught that Jesus was a uniquely important creature of God, but that Jesus was not eternal or equal with the Father. Arius is famous for saying about Jesus, "There was when he was not."

Athanasius opposed Arius and asserted the eternal generation of God the Son and the equality of God the Son with God the Father.

The controversy split the Church and spilled over into violence in the streets. It led Emperor Constantine to call the Council of Nicaea, hoping to settle it. Eventually, the Nicene Creed says that Jesus is "Begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of the same essence as the Father ..."

Athanasius spent his life fighting for those words and for that concept. "For God so loved the world that he gave his **only** Son ..."

Let's acknowledge the unique origin of Jesus.

### **Step Three: Let's appreciate the magnitude of God's giving.**

#### **God's giving is directed at us.**

In John chapter 6 there is a discussion about God's giving to us. Jesus performed a miracle in which he fed a multitude with five loaves and two fish. The crowd followed Jesus the next day and asked him to do it again, to keep doing it. In John 6:31 they credited Moses with giving their forefathers food to eat in the desert when they fled from slavery in Egypt:

***"Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"***

They wanted Jesus to do it again!

Jesus corrected them in **John 6:32** and reminded them that God the Father gave them bread and food to eat:

***Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven."***

In **John 6:51** Jesus let them know that he was offering to give them something different:

***"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."***

God constantly gives to his people.

#### **God's giving shocked the woman at the well.**

In John chapter 4 Jesus stopped by a well outside a Samaritan village in the heat of the day. It was shocking that Jesus, a Jew, went into Samaritan territory. The Jews and Samaritans hated one another in the first century. It was shocking when Jesus, a man, spoke to a woman. That was rare, too, in that day. It was even shocking when Jesus asked her for something. In **John 4:7** we read:

***A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."***

The woman was skeptical and afraid of being hurt, so she rebuffed him. Jesus responded in **John 4:10**:

***"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."***

Giving remained a front-burner topic between them in this discussion.

Like many people, the woman at the well was confused about who gives good things. She credited the Patriarch Jacob with digging that well. In **John 4:12** we read:

***"Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well ..."***

The giving was actually done by God.

Jesus made clear that he was offering something far, far greater in **John 4:14**:

***"... but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."***

Their conversation continued. Eventually she realized that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and that he could give her exactly what she wanted and needed.

What she says in **John 4:15** summarizes her conclusion about Jesus,

***"Sir, give me this water ..."***

She was shocked by the giving nature of God.

### **The full magnitude of God's giving only becomes clear on the cross.**

I cannot begin to imagine what it meant for God the Father to give his Son, his only-begotten Son, and to send that Son into this world to live and die to pay the price for our sin.

I cannot begin to imagine what it must have been for God the Father to pour the full weight of our sin onto Jesus' shoulders as he hung on the cross, to turn his face away and hide his presence from his beloved Son, to pour his full wrath out on that sin and Son united, and to watch him suffer and die.

I cannot imagine what it must have been for Jesus to set aside heaven to take on human flesh and to suffer rejection and humiliation at the hands of the creatures he made.

I cannot imagine what it must have been for the Lord of life to die.

The cross shows us the full magnitude of God's giving and the real nature of God's love.

**Romans 8:32** expresses the extent of God's giving nature:

***He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?***

"For God so loved the world that **he gave** his only Son ..."

We are three steps closer to understanding the true meaning of Christmas.

### **Step Four: Let's experience the joy of getting this Christmas.**

#### **A friend shared a classic Peanuts cartoon with me recently.**

In it, Charlie Brown's sister, Sally, is writing an English paper.

The topic of the paper is the true meaning of Christmas.

Sally begins, "To me, Christmas is the joy of getting ..."

Her old brother tries to correct her, "You mean 'giving' ... Christmas is the joy of giving ..."

Sally quips back, "I don't have the slightest idea what you're talking about!"

That's Sally! But is Sally right in a strange kind of way?

#### **The joy of getting solves the mystery of being born again.**

In John chapter 3, Jesus talks a lot about being born again.

In John 3, Jesus is talking with Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who came to see him at night to try to understand Jesus.

Jesus seems to know what Nicodemus wants. Nicodemus wants to know how one gets into the kingdom of God. Jesus gets straight to the point and tells Nicodemus that to get into the kingdom of God, one must be born again.

But how can one be born again? The joy of getting solves the mystery of being born again.

### **The joy of getting eluded Nicodemus.**

Nicodemus asked if a fully grown adult is supposed to enter their mother's womb a second time to be born.

Jesus tried to explain that the first birth is being born of the flesh. The second birth happens when the power of the Holy Spirit transforms one's spirit and gives one new life.

Nicodemus could not wrap his head around it. Jesus chided him for being a teacher of Israel but not being able to get something so important. Why could he not understand?

Nicodemus' faith was all about what he could do, what he could give.

This was something he could not do or give. It was something he had to get.

The joy of getting eluded Nicodemus.

### **The joy of getting can lead to being born again.**

As Jesus continued to explain to Nicodemus, the kingdom of God, life in the Spirit, new life, eternal life all come because God gave and gives.

God the Father gave his only-begotten, unique Son to the world.

God the Son would be lifted up on a cross and die to pay the price for the sin of the world.

Then God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—would offer forgiveness, new life, adoption, sanctification, and eternal life to all who would receive it.

That's what **John 1:12-13** means:

***But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.***

It all comes down to getting.

In this case, the joy of getting can lead to being born again.

### **Let's experience the joy of getting this Christmas.**

Jesus Christ is THE Son.

He is unique, the only-begotten Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

His life and death on the cross represent the fullest magnitude of God's giving, loving nature.

And we must receive him to be born again.

That's what Christmas is all about.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son ...

Now we are four steps closer to understanding the true meaning of Christmas.