

Advance Notice
Week 4: Fulfilled Notice

I. You guys have come through in a huge way! It's so exciting to be able to give a meaningful gift that will take God's story from Norfolk to the nations.

A. Maybe you can think back over the years and bring a gift to mind that you knew would be perfect for someone special. Last year I was doing my Christmas shopping at Thrift City and found my dad the perfect gift. It was a rare copy of a book written by none other than Nick Saban called, "How Good Do You Want to Be?" I was so excited to give that gift and enjoyed giving some advance notice of what was in store without fully disclosing the surprise.

B. We think of the Christmas story as an event that happened one starry night in Bethlehem and it was. The significance isn't just in the occurrence but in the substance. The heart of Christmas is a:

[Slide]: Gift.

1. And not just a gift but the gift of God's Son Jesus Christ! It's a mystery we can't fully fathom but lying in a manger that night was Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man. Considering Jesus, the Apostle Paul tells us in Colossians 2:

Colossians 2:19 (CSB) [Slide]: 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.

2. God wrapped on flesh and took a walk in our shoes. God rolled up His sleeves and while remaining free of sin stepped into the mess of humanity to rescue us from our sins. A gift of this magnitude required some advance notice and that's precisely what God did! God went all out in His effort to redeem us from sin and a gift that big requires a well thought out delivery and plan. All throughout the Old Testament beginning in Genesis 3:15, we see God begin to roll out the advance notice of the gift.

3. God put thought and intentionality into the greatest gift to ever be delivered. If you came into the room today wondering if God is concerned about your life, may I tell you that He is! God did not want to be separated from humanity even though we were the ones who chose to walk away. What's so significant about the first advance notice of the gift is that Genesis 3:15 falls immediately after sin entered the world through Adam and Eve. God didn't have to debate or think about sending the greatest gift and the only gift capable of mending that irreconcilable gap from a human perspective. He was ready to announce His advance notice that Satan, sin, and death would not get the final word. He would come born of a virgin to personally pay the penalty. The significance of Christmas goes beyond an event! It's the substance of the gift! Jesus Christ the God-Man!

II. Matthew's gospel has a different flavor than Mark, Luke, or John the other accounts. Each author, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells the historical account of Jesus from their perspective to an intended audience. Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience who was familiar with the Old Testament and God's advance notice of the promised Messiah. Matthew's account is imbedded more than the others with Old Testament prophecy because he wants people to see the significance of the event but more so the substance of the gift!

A. [Slide]: God's advance notice is fulfilled!

Here's what Matthew writes as he shows us the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. Just one advance notice given by God in the 8th Century B.C.:

Matthew 1:22-23 (CSB) [Slide]: 22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel, which is translated "God is with us."

1. The advance notice had been given and now it was fulfilled in order to display the substance of the gift! Jesus was born of a virgin, in the City of David (Bethlehem), to peasants just as the advance notice of Scripture had foretold! God had delivered on the greatest gift imaginable to take on sin and death so that we might live!

2. God gave us advance notice and fulfilled "all this" to show you and me just how much He desires to be in:

[Slide]: Relationship.

a. Consider for a moment that God who created the world and everything in it wants to be in a relationship with you and me. A gift by its very nature isn't an obligation. This is God demonstrating that He doesn't just love you, He likes you too! It's a gift that required advance notice and Matthew shows us that every detail has been fulfilled to show us the substance of the gift.

B. Over the past two thousand years, Christmas has taken on a lot of clutter. Not all bad but it can distract us from the gift. Christmas is about relationship, and not just a relationship, but our relationship with God. The name of God most associated with Christmas is:

[Slide]: Immanuel.

It's a Hebrew word (which is the original language of the Old Testament) we translate:

[Slide]: God is with us.

1. I don't know what you brought into this room tonight. All of us have moments of happy and crappy. Christmas is a time of joy but it's also very tough for so many. My heart grieves for those who are struggling this Christmas but here's what I can promise you today:

[Slide]: God is with us.

2. Just say that in your mind, "God is with us." "God is with me." The substance of the gift is God going all out to do whatever it took to extend relationship with you and me. God wrapped on flesh and took a walk in our shoes. I can't explain that mystery, but I know it's true because it's God that sustains me on the good days and the bad days. I'm here today because God is with me. Christmas is the fulfilled notice that He wants to be in relationship with us all.

C. Someone in here is thinking, "but you don't know what kind of mess I'm dealing with." I don't but there's something significant about Jesus spending His first night in a feeding trough for animals. I don't know what mess you're dealing with, but Jesus demonstrated from His arrival that He wouldn't be deterred by a mess. Stop viewing your mess as an obstacle and open up your life, mess and all, to Jesus Christ. He's done everything necessary for relationship; we simply accept the gift. The advance notice has been fulfilled. The gift has been delivered. Jesus would live a perfect life, die a sinner's death, AND be resurrected on the 3rd day defeating death and extending the gift of life to all who believe. There was only one way: Immanuel, God is with us.

1. This Christmas I've thought frequently about another advance notice that also comes from the Book of Isaiah:

Isaiah 52:10 (CSB) [Slide]: 10 The LORD has displayed his holy arm in the sight of all the nations; all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

2. In plain talk: God rolled up His sleeves to do the work of salvation. God went hands-on to see that relationship be extended to sinful humanity. Wow! The work has been done; the gift has been delivered. Please accept the gift this Christmas.