



WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

# “UNOPENED PRESENTS”

John Galbreath  
Bible Study Series

Text: Luke 2:1-12  
Date: December 24, 1961

About Westminster's Galbreath Bible Study Series:

This lesson is one taken from a sermon preached by John Galbreath at Westminster Presbyterian Church on December 24, 1961.

To complete the lesson, we suggest that you begin by reading the designated Bible passage (Luke 2:1-12).

Next, review the outline of the sermon. Reflect on the chosen scripture and how you would “fill in” the remainder of the message from the chosen passage.

Then, review the study questions posed about the lesson — whether by yourself or in your small group.

Finally, share your thoughts on the Galbreath Bible Study blog on the Westminster Intranet.

For that year’s Christmas Eve baptism, the water was from the River Jordan and was provided by Mr. and Mrs. E. Dean Volmer.

The bulletin also noted that: “The White Gift Offering will be used for food, shelter, medicine and resettlement of the Chinese refugees in Hong Kong, the Arabs in the Middle East, the homeless Bengali in India, the East Zone Germans in West Berlin and the Cubans who have found refuge in this country.”

## I. Introduction

- A. Let us not be too critical of the innkeeper – we’d probably have done the same.
1. Keeping hostel was his business.
  2. Seldom had Bethlehem had so many guests.
    - a) *Was not this the first time that Quirinius – or any other governor, for that matter – had called all Jews to be enrolled, in anticipation of a new system of taxation.*
    - b) *A harrying and prosperous day.*
  3. If Joseph and Mary had been there early, they could have had a room.
    - a) *But in her situation, the journey had been wearisome and travel slow.*
    - b) *There was nothing personal about it.*
    - c) *First come, first served.*
  4. One could hardly expect him to give up his own bed.

## II. First Come, First Served

- A. A harrowing and prosperous season.
1. There are so many good things to do!
    - a) *I cannot accept all the sour criticism of Christmas.*
    - b) *The children saved their birthday money and errand money to buy presents.*
      - (1) Call this commercialization?
    - c) *We want to see the store windows – and the Alcoa and U.S. Steel Buildings.*
    - d) *We went to a neighborhood Christmas party – and we just have the nicest neighbors! Why did it take Christmas to get us together?*
    - e) *We’ve seen some of the TV shows – how amazing that such magic and beauty should come right into our home*
    - f) *We’ve been opening cards.*
      - (1) We didn’t send them to those we see each week, in order that we could adopt support of a Buckhorn child.

(2) But we've read and re-read those we received.

**B. We understand those who are dismayed with Christmas.**

1. There are those for whom buying presents is a chore, and whose only Christmas cheer comes in liquid form.
2. Not all the TV programs are elevating, even at Christmas time – but some of the most dreary come from religious sources.
3. We begrudge the cost of Christmas cards that are passed only because public relations demands it.

**C. When Christmas becomes a bore – a racket – or an orgy, it is the fault of the celebrant, not the system.**

1. Some people make marriage into a wearisome sentence – but I'm not going to outlaw marriage on account of it.
2. Some people have taken a trumpet, a sax, drums and a guitar, have issued cat-calls on it, put it on a platter and made money – but that is no reason to abandon music.

**D. The sadness that comes with Christmas is the wistful sadness in knowing that there are so many folks we would like to visit – so many gifts we wish we could give.**

1. We are like a child with more presents than he can open.

**E. The innkeeper had this in common with us – a highly prosperous day – but he missed the most profitable event of all.**

**III. The Innkeeper's Oversight**

**A. He could have given his own for the Christ.**

1. Jesus would not be just one of the crowd – it was the innkeeper's own room or none at all.

**B. In the celebration of the Christmas, faith is not just a fringe benefit – it is the heart of Christmas that gives all else purpose, or it is nothing.**

#### IV. Conclusion

*We gather together in the silence – most of the packages wrapped, the house lights beginning to go off. At the break of the natal day, we would offer him room in our heart – the center of our heart.*

---

**Study Questions -- Part I**

*Bible Reading: Luke 2:1-12*

Luke 2:1 through 12 says: <sup>1</sup>And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. <sup>2</sup>(And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup>And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. <sup>4</sup>And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) <sup>5</sup>To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. <sup>6</sup>And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. <sup>7</sup>And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. <sup>8</sup>And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. <sup>10</sup>And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. <sup>11</sup>For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

- Think about this familiar passage in some new way. If you have never thought about it from Joseph's perspective, consider what he would have been thinking as he worried about Mary and felt helpless to find a place for her. Or perhaps think of the shepherds and how they might have responded. How would you respond if in our modern world "an angel of the Lord" came upon you? What questions would you have? What would you do?

**Study Questions -- Part II***Sermon :*

I.A. Have you ever thought about the innkeeper? What would you have done? Do you wonder if he ever heard of Jesus' ministry? What would he have thought then about having turned Mary and Joseph away?

I.A.3.c Do you think the innkeeper even considered asking another guest to give up space for the expectant mother?

II.A. Is the Christmas season harrowing for you? What can your family do to eliminate some of the busy-ness and focus on the meaning of the day?

II.A.1.c. What aspects of the season do you look forward to each year?

II.A.1.e. Fifty years later, do you think we still have the same sense of wonder at having Christmas "specials" come to us? How does the internet impact how you enjoy Christmas traditions?

II.A.1.f.(1) Are there elements to your Christmas celebration that you could alter so that you could do more for those in need?

II.B.3. How has the Christmas card ritual changed since 1961?

II.C. What do you and your family do to make sure that Christmas doesn't become too commercialized in your lives?

II.D. If you had the power to give any gifts you could, what would they be? To whom would you give them?

III.B. How do you demonstrate your faith in your Christmas celebrations to your family? To your friends? To others you encounter?

IV.What do you do to assure that Jesus is at the center of your Christmas celebration?