

HANDLE WITH CARE

Why It is Important to Handle Christmas Carefully

Text: Luke 1:1-4

I

Every year, at about this time, the question arises: "*How will you handle Christmas?*" "Oh, my gosh, there's so much to get done; how will I ever do it? I hardly made a dent on my shopping list on Black Friday. I've got no idea what to get for Uncle Fred or what to tell my mom to get for me. Why in the world did I say we'd host that party at our house? And how DID those people ever get their Christmas lights up or their cards out already?! Good heavens, I was still eating the Halloween candy and then it was Thanksgiving! Is there any way we could all agree to move Christmas to February?"

For some of us, I suppose, the question of how we'll handle Christmas is doubly hard this year. We lost our job in these past months. How will we ever manage to put Christmas on for the kids? We saw somebody we loved die or went through a divorce this past year. How will Christmas ever be the same? We moved or messed up or saw our health or some other arrangement we used to count on mangled in some way. Our lives are under even greater pain or pressure than usual. How will we get through this season that's supposed to be about such glad tidings, peace and joy?

Even for those of us for whom life seems to be working just fine right now, Christmas poses a special challenge, doesn't it? There's so much clatter and crush to this season. There's so much rushing and wrapping and relentless ringing this time of year. How do we keep it from obscuring our experience of the true reason for this season? How do we feel for ourselves, or help the people who look to us feel, what Christmas is really all about?

II

The world around us supplies some help with this. If you pay attention in weeks ahead, you'll encounter a wealth of stories that offer some counsel in handling Christmas. You'll have the chance to hear about *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* and the *Grinch Who Stole Christmas*. They'll run the *Polar Express* and the *Miracle on 34th Street*, the *Bells of Saint Mary's*, and *It's a Wonderful Life*. You'll learn about *Frosty* and *Charlie Brown* and, of course, hear the tale of *Old St. Nick*. We could do a lot worse, of course, than to soak in some of these stories. They remind us of the importance of giving and of seeking the good in ourselves and our fellow man. They speak of the value of hope and of helping out others. But if even this is the best that we unwrap at Christmas, we will still have missed the most important gift of this season. What we need is the far older and more substantive story that we'll be taking in our hands today and in the weeks to come.

In the opening verses of the Gospel that bears his name, a physician by the name of Luke, writes these words to a man named "Theophilus," a Greek word that simply means "Friend of God." **"Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us,"** Luke begins. He's saying that the things I am going to tell you are so important that I am just one of many people who've dedicated themselves to telling this same story. And this story, Friend, is not just any story. It is the account of the fulfillment of the awesome purposes, prophecies and promises of God, glorious things that have been in motion since the foundations of this world.

I am passing along these truths to you **"just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus."** In other words, what I am about to tell you, I did not make up or embellish. Like those before me, I had placed in my hands a staggering gift – a record from eyewitnesses of the amazing activity of God. I carefully investigated everything that had been told me and I found it be to be so trustworthy, that I felt compelled **"to write an orderly account"** of it so that others would know about it – **"so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught."**

What Luke is saying, in effect, is that I have a story to tell you that is the secret to certainty in this life. It is a gift which, when truly received is the key to handling whatever else is going on with you in this world right now. So whatever else you are juggling today and in the days ahead, don't drop THIS ball. Don't get distracted by lesser stories and trivial pursuits. Handle with care what I now pass to you. Teach others to cherish it. For this is the good news: "God so loved this world that he sent his only begotten Son..." to be our Savior (John 3:16-17). This is the great story whose significance for your life and mine we will unwrap in coming weeks and which – in Scripture and Song – we start to tell today.

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Handling Christmas (Part 1)

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

1. What's your favorite Christmas story, movie, or book? What do you like about it?
2. In the Bible passage under study, the gospel writer Luke is careful to underline that:
 - "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things" he will go on to describe (v.1)
 - What he is passing along to his readers was "handed down to us by... eyewitnesses" of the events described (v.2)
 - He has himself "carefully investigated everything" reported (v.3)

What do you think Luke is trying to emphasize here?

3. Does it matter a lot, a little, or not at all to you whether the events described in the gospels are factually true?
4. If the events and teachings described are indeed "certain" (v.4) – in other words, if Jesus is who he and the gospels claim he is and all of his teachings are also true – then what are the implications of that?
5. What do you need to be saved "from" or saved "for"?