

WHAT GIFT WILL YOU GIVE JESUS?

Scripture Reading

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus. (Matt 1:18-25)

Today as we remember the birth of Jesus, God’s gift of love to us,

I want to share with you a familiar story or fable,
slightly rewritten for this season,
and then make a few comments about what love is like.

First the fable:

“Once upon a time there lived a fisherman and his wife. Their home was a humble two-roomed cottage with a tiny garden and a well. Every day the fisherman would go out in his little boat and in the evening bring home his catch, sometimes good, sometimes poor. This was their livelihood.

But the fisherman’s wife was discontented. “Why should I have to live in this hovel? Is it too much to expect a decent home with water and electricity and a kitchen? I wish I were a lady.” Her continual complaining made the fisherman quite miserable.

One day, something happened which changed their lives. The man caught a strange and beautiful fish which startled him by speaking, "Please thrown me back into the sea and I'll grant whatever you wish."

The fisherman thought a bit and then replied, "So be it. I wish my wife were a lady and lived in a proper house with water, electricity and a kitchen."

When he returned that evening he found that his wish had been granted, and his wife was very pleased. But as the months passed she began to grumble again, "Is it too much to expect something better than this pokey house? I wish I were a Duchess, with a mansion and servants and a carriage. Why did you ask for so little? I'm sure the fish meant us to do better than this."

Driven by her nagging, the fisherman tried to contact the fish again and rowed his boat to the spot. No sooner had he called than the fish appeared and agreed to his request.

But the duchess was still not satisfied. Within a month she was grumbling and complaining again, "I wish I were a queen, go and see your fish again." And so he did.

Life in the palace was luxurious, but the fisherman's wife, now a queen, wasn't content for long, "What I would really like," she said, "would be to be God. I'm sure your fish will understand that this is what I wanted all along."

When the man returned from his last visit to his fishy friend, he found no palace on the shore, no mansion, not a house. Not even his little old cottage was there. But then he heard crying, and noticing a cave in the cliff face, he went closer. Inside it was fashioned into a rough stable. There were 2 oxen and a donkey. And in the manger a little baby lie crying."

The wife in our rewrite of the story had, of course,
 forgotten what God is like in this world,
 in human flesh.

She'd forgotten about the circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth.

She'd forgotten about the manger and the cross.

She'd forgotten that our God is a God who comes to **this** world...

A God who identifies with his people,
 and especially with the poorest
 and the most humble of people

It is so easy to forget what it cost Jesus to come to earth as one of us.

- That he was born to die for us.
- That he was despised and rejected by men.
- That he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows,
- That he was smitten and afflicted.
- That he was pierced for our transgressions,
- That he was crushed for our iniquities;
- That the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
 and by his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:4-5)

The Almighty God, Creator and King of the Universe,
 gave up his heavenly throne,
 gave up being worshipped
 and adored by angels and saints,
 in order to come to us
 and to offer us heaven.

There was a painter (I've forgotten his name now)
 who offended a lot of people
 by painting a picture of the baby Jesus in the manger,
 with the roof beams of the stable
 casting the shadow of a
 cross over his face.

But that painter was right.

God was born as a baby in Bethlehem,
 knowing full well
 that the cross would follow as
 surely as night follows day.

¹³ **Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down their life for his friends.**
 (John 15:13)

This is the love of Christmas...

- God laid aside his throne,
 and in Jesus became one of us,
 like us in every way:

The Hebrew writes states it just like this:

¹⁷ *For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way* (Heb 2:17)

- and being one of us he further humbled himself and gave his life for us.

⁶ *Who, being in very nature God,
 did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
⁷ but made himself nothing,
 taking the very nature of a servant,
 being made in human likeness.
⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
 he humbled himself
 and became obedient to death—
 even death on a cross! (Phil 2:6-8)*

¹⁶ *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. (1 John 3:16)*

In the face of this incredible
 and beautiful
 and sobering news,
 there can be only one response:

to love God with all
 our heart
 and soul
 and mind
 and
 strength;
 and to love one another
 in the way that God loves us.

⁸ *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom 5:8)*

¹⁹ *that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. (2 Cor 5:19)*

²¹ *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor 5:21)*

Jesus' love is the most important part of the Christmas story.

It is the love of God
 that brings to us the hope
 and the peace
 and the joy
 that we need.

And it is our love for one another
 in Christ's name
 that makes Christmas worthwhile.

Someone, I know not who, wrote a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 13 which goes like this:

If I decorate my house perfectly with plaid bows, strands of twinkling lights and shiny balls, but do not show love to my family, I'm just another decorator.

If I slave away in the kitchen, baking dozens of Christmas cookies, preparing gourmet meals and arranging a beautifully adorned table at mealtime, but do not show love to my family,

I'm just another cook.

If I work at the soup kitchen, carol in the nursing home and give all that I have to charity, but do not show love to my family, it profits me nothing.

If I trim the spruce with shimmering angels and crocheted snowflakes, attend a myriad of holiday parties and sing at church but do not focus on Christ, I have missed the point.

Love stops the cooking to hug the child.

Love sets aside the decorating to kiss the spouse.

Love is kind, though harried and tired.

Love doesn't envy another's home that has coordinated Christmas china and table linens.

Love doesn't yell at the kids to get out of the way.

Love doesn't give only to those who are able to give in return but rejoices in giving to those who can't.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails. Video games will break, pearl necklaces will be lost, golf clubs will rust.

But giving the gift of love will endure.

The gift of love will endure.

Indeed - that is what Christmas is all about. The gift of love.

I would like to conclude with words written by Jim Swanson.

They are from a Christmas Greeting he wrote
and sent out to his friends and family some 30 years ago
- the year that he had a daughter born to him with Downs Syndrome.

This is part of what he wrote:

Into a world of strength and pride
a child is born, weak and humble,
having no power -
except that power which alone can conquer all others:
Love.
Such was, and is, Christmas.

CONCLUSION

- **What gift would Jesus want you to give Him today?**
- **Could it be you?**
- **Acts 2:37-38**
- **What gift will you give Jesus today?**