

## **THE GIFT OF CHRISTMAS; CHRISTMAS I; 12.27.09; THY/WPC**

Two things make a gift special: when the giver really wants to give it and when the receiver gets something she really needs.

In any age there is a lot of obligatory giving. You know, a house-warming gift if you are invited to a new home; most of the giving that goes on in offices and workplaces; the mandatory maple syrup my cousin used to give whenever he stayed with anyone.

But then there are gifts that are unsolicited, given with no strings attached; given because the giver really wants the receiver to have a particular gift. Like the little lemon squeezer the son of a colleague gave his parents many Christmases ago when the boy was old enough to understand that Christmas wasn't just about getting but also giving. Every time they used the lemon squeezer they thought of him. Then one day recently the lemon squeezer fell off the kitchen counter and broke. They will replace it, they said, but making salads will never be the same. You know a gift is special when the giver really wants to give it.

You also know a gift is special when it is what the person receiving it really wants or needs whatever it is. I heard a hilarious piece on NPR last week about inappropriate gifts – I don't mean naughty just irrelevant to the person getting the gift.

Many used and even unwashed items fell into this category; also for some strange reason it might take a psychologist to figure out – toilets.

One woman's ex-husband gave her a twelve gauge shotgun and bright orange hunting jacket and hat – she abhorred killing anything.

But then there's the gift that really means something because it could only be given if the giver understood the person getting the gift at a fairly intimate level.

For example, our son was telling us about the 'secret Santa' they observe every year where he works. Each employee puts three things on a list and they draw lists then shop for the person from one of the items on the list. Our son put on his list anything with Livestrong or Nike on it and then for the third he just wrote 'food.' He gets a little heat at work for bringing a big cooler with healthy snacks he eats through the day carrots; humus; rice cakes; lots of water; granola; organic fruit.

So his secret Santa watched him every day when he took a snack break and then this Santa went to the organic food store and got these special, healthy items. When we asked our son what he got for Christmas it was the first thing he mentioned. Gifts that say 'you' all over them are special.

We give gifts at Christmas, in part at least, in recognition of God's gift to us of the Christ Child.

Every gift given is or maybe was, at one point of history a long time ago when this tradition got started, a re-enactment of God's giving us his only son. In that sense, every time we give a gift it is a 'little Christmas' if you will.

And the gift of the infant Jesus to humanity is the perfect gift because God really wants to give us this gift and because it is a gift that we really need.

How do we know God really wants to give us the gift of his son? What makes God want us to have his son?

It has to do with God knowing that his son could finally get through to us, open us to better, more abundant life.

I imagine God saying something like this to himself, “I have sent prophets and kings and other leaders; I have revealed myself in mountains and storms and in the still quiet moments but they seem so often to miss that it’s me behind all these leaders and signs. If I come to them as one of them, not a powerful ruler, but a lowly peasant then I can reach them, show them who I am and how much I love them.”

God really wants us to have the gift of his son. But Jesus is also a gift we really need. People who’ve encountered Jesus talk about experiencing a deep peace they never knew possible; or a deep purpose that gives more satisfaction than they ever experienced.

Something happens to us when Jesus, God’s gift to us, comes into our lives. We seem to change for the better; take on higher standards; a willingness to risk for greater goals; a generosity of spirit that was unknown to us – and that we find surprising in spite of ourselves.

The change is so dramatic that it’s easy to conclude that Jesus is something we need because without Jesus there seems to be a whole dimension of life that many of us would never have known.

A gift is special when the giver really wants to give it and when the receiver really needs it. That’s what Christmas is.

There are twelve days of Christmas – time enough for you and me to ponder these things and ‘open’ God’s gift of this peasant baby, rabbi/healer/preacher – and let him into our lives.

How do we open the gift of Jesus? Study him in the gospels; get to know him in conversation some call ‘prayer’; experiment in your life living like he did and asking yourself when you are faced with a difficult decision what he might do if he were in your shoes.

With all the gift giving at Christmas sometimes I fear we leave this precious package from God unopened.

Or maybe we opened it many Christmases ago and haven’t considered it’s a gift we are invited to open each day.

It’s like finding a brightly wrapped package under the tree that perhaps you missed Christmas morning. Go ahead open it. You just might find it’s the best gift of all. Amen.