

CHRISTMAS DAY '20 B – CHRISTMAS IS MORE THAN A GIFT

How do you think you did this year? With the gifts I mean? Oh...I don't mean did you get everything you wanted...or did you blow out your bank account...but do you think your choices of gifts for your friends & family were...right? Appropriate? Appreciated? Was there some sense of satisfaction as you cleaned up the first stages of wrapping paper & debris? Did your planning meet your expectations? Or were you like many scrambling around at the last minute hoping a quick bargain, wild guess or afterthought would be ok?

I ask because marketers & manufacturers are pouring over the sales data asking the same questions trying to determine Christmas 2021's "big items." Seriously...by March the preliminary test mktg & focus grouping is done. By May the decisions will be made. By July the products/toys for next Christmas will be in the production pipeline. In the billions \$\$ C-mas mkt, there are no wild guesses – no "afterthoughts" – no maybe this'll do. Every item on every shelf every year is the result of analysis planning & preparation. By September the ads begin, displays are shipped to stores, & most of the making is over. If it isn't done by then...it won't be. In fact much of that started as you & I were making our purchases weeks ago...or yesterday

But you know/I know...at some point you'll find the receipts. You'll try it on & take it back. The kids will bring you something barely unwrapped but broken. You'll re-gift. Christmas, as the world knows it, is returnable, replaceable, repairable, recyclable. It's like any gift...**you** get to decide if it's "just for you." **You** get to decide if it's "just right." **You** determine the value & worth of the gift...But that's not Christmas... Because Christmas is more than a gift of circumstance, season or convenience. Christmas is the fullness of God's love, the abundance of God's joy, the overflow of God's faithfulness for all that He has made in his love for his delight

So the Word became human (flesh) & made his home among us. He was full of unending love & faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one & only Son.

When John sits down to write his biography of Jesus...50 or more years after Jesus lived died rose ascended to the Father...John doesn't bother w/ the nativity narrative...no angels shepherds magi. John assumes you've heard that. John assumes you know the life of Jesus unfolds against the backdrop of Caesar ruling the world by force. John assumes you know this unlikely "king" is born to a poor Jewish teen & her baffled fiancé. John assumes you know this dubious pregnancy will be doubted forever by those who really don't want to believe. John figures you know the first to hear about this baby weren't the well-heeled/well-connected but shepherds so dodgy they

weren't allowed to testify in court. And the news they hear from the angels is an answer to a prayer & a fulfillment of a promise so old they'd almost been forgotten.

John's not interested in stage play nativity...John wants you to be taken up into the great news that **THIS** birth & **THIS** baby are **MORE** because the baby Mary holds is, inexplicably, GOD. MADE. FLESH. God Himself, weak & wordless wrapped in strips of cloth. GOD. MADE. FLESH. Made every bit like one of us so that every one of us might be re-made like Him.

Christmas is the good news that our Saviour came to us wrapped in swaddling cloth born amongst farm animals & grinding poverty. Why does that matter? **Well.1st** As you read the gospels there is not 1 hint of 1 person who was afraid to draw near to Jesus. Not 1 person held back for fear of being rejected. Not 1 stayed away for fear of being judged. Not 1 ^{w/drew} for fear of being shunned. **REMEMBER THAT.**

Remember that the next time you are amazed at your own failures. Remember that the next time guilt/shame/grudge burns holes in your stomach. Remember that the next time you feel the church is cold or uncaring. Remember it is **WE** who create the distance, stop our ears, turn to the dark & deep freeze our hearts. It is **JESUS** who builds the bridge...who comes as light to warm as well as guide...who comes to reclaim & restore...*But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the right (power) to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.*

From the beginning...God's plan was that we...his human creations would live in response to his grace & goodness & love and that we would delight in his presence forever...that we would live in relationship to the Father always...bear his image, live his presence & live out his will in this world...From the beginning God's plan was that humans who for some reason choose darkness over light would be taken from darkness & death into light & life forever...by **his** love by **his** power by **his** plan

John wants you to know...God has been around forever & will be forever. He loved you before you were born, loves you now, & will love you throughout eternity. There is nothing & no one else eternal like that – unchanging & unending. There is no one & nothing else that loves you like that – timeless & infinite. No one else will go to hell & back to make you his child except God the Father who sent Jesus the Son so that the Holy Spirit could draw you in love to his heart. **REMEMBER THAT.**

And 2nd... *He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, & even they rejected him. Jesus came into this world knowing what it would cost Him. Every lash of the whip, every thorn in the crown, every mm of each nail...he knew. Every jeer. Every taunt. Every slap & spit...he knew.*

He bore in His pure being the marks of evil, so we might be cleansed/healed. He bore in His sinless soul the weight of sin, so we could be forgiven. He bore in His human frame the hurt & pain of injustice, so we might be made righteous & live justly. He died/rose so we could live with him forever...He drew near to us in love for our salvation so God could speak into your heart & mine the invitation to life w/ the Father forever:

“When the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children...Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child” – Gal 4:4-5,7

“When God our Saviour revealed his kindness & love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth & new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Because of his grace he declared us righteous & gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.” – Titus 3:4-7

Christmas is the fullness of God’s love, the abundance of God’s joy, the overflow of God’s faithfulness for all that He has made in his love for his delight. Christmas is “*grace upon grace,*” “*one gracious blessing after another,*” because God draws us to his heart in his Son Jesus with “*unfailing love & faithfulness.*” Christmas is the Father’s eternal embrace of every life, every season, every circumstance so that you would be his forever.

Let’s pray with that in mind...

Lord Jesus...Open wide the window of our spirits, & fill us with your light. Open wide the door of our hearts that we might receive you & worship you as true sons & daughters of the Father. Open wide the doors of heaven & flood the world with your grace & mercy again today that all people might experience your salvation and be made new in your presence. We pray Jesus in your Name...Amen