

The Perfect Gift
Matthew 2:1-12
Dec. 27, 2009

What did you get for Christmas?

Besides “how was your Christmas?” that is probably the most frequently asked question this time of year. Just for fun, find someone close to you that is not a relative and tell him or her one thing you received for Christmas. Even if it’s something you gave yourself, tell a neighbor about one gift.

All during Advent and even on Christmas Eve I reminded us that Christmas is about the wonder, the joy, the peace, and the salvation that Christ brought to the world. I encouraged us to focus on the spiritual side of the holiday and not get lost in the “stuff” of Christmas.

This morning however I plan on talking about gifts. Since they are a big part of our holiday tradition as well as a key component in the scripture lesson we heard this morning, I thought we could spend some time considering “the perfect gift”.

In a theological sense, Jesus was the perfect gift.

Given by God, Jesus provides a way for us to experience abundant life on earth and eternal life in heaven. Just like any present, Christ’s salvation is free to us. We can’t earn it, we certainly don’t deserve it, but it is ours to have. All we need to do is accept the gift!

The Wise Men acknowledged what God was doing through Christ. To honor the Holy Child they brought gifts. We know the gifts: Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. We certainly are aware of what gold is. Just to remind us, frankincense and myrrh were both resins. A resin is basically dried tree sap. Both resins were used to make incense. The frankincense was mixed with spices and seeds to create pleasant aromas. In Jesus day myrrh was often used in the embalming process.

Besides their use in incense, both resins had medical uses. There is some evidence that this medical application of myrrh was common in Jesus’ day.

Jesus was given gold and two types of resins. As a child I always wondered what a baby would want with those gifts.

It was only when I got older that I learned how those items were probably used to cover the expenses while in Egypt. Remember after the Wise Men had gone, an Angel appeared to Joseph telling him to get up and take the family to Egypt.

Some believe that the reason we exchange presents on Christmas is because we are following the example of the Wise Men. Whether this is true or not, they do leave for us a model of gift giving.

I have to admit, I did not fully research this message. I cannot tell you the history of gift giving on Christmas. I'm sure over time there have been traditions that have been established. I also know that different countries have different traditions.

A big factor in the gift equation is money. The wealthier the culture, the more elaborate the gift giving. Right now I would say the United States is the epitome of excess in Christmas presents.

When you have commercials for Lexus automobiles and 50-inch Flat Screen TV's, and you have folks running up large credit card balances, you know the focus is on the biggest and best gifts.

It is to this out of control spending at Christmas that I addressed my Advent sermon series. "The Christmas you've always longed for" was about moving toward a more simple, less stressed approach to Christmas. As I was thinking about this ideal Christmas a question came to my mind, what would be the ideal gift?

It wouldn't be a thing would it? There are plenty of miserable people that have a house full of stuff. Even those things we have received through the years that gave us great pleasure eventually lose their pizzazz.

So what is the ideal gift? There are some things that we would desire but are not possible. I remember Disney's take on Aladdin. The Genie told Aladdin he had 3 wishes, but there were restrictions. He could not bring back someone from the dead, nor could he wish for someone's love.

I think those two restrictions make sense when we wish for our ideal gift.

As I was contemplating this question I heard a song on the radio. The song, sung by Kelly Clarkson, is titled “My Grown Up Christmas Wish”. Let me read the chorus to you.

“No more lives torn apart
that wars would never start
and time would heal all hearts
and everyone would have a friend
and right would always win
and love would never end, no
this is my grown up Christmas wish.”

I had heard this song before, but it really struck a cord. Maybe the words of this song reflect the perfect Christmas gift. A world of peace and joy would be the greatest present we could ever receive. But as I thought about the song longer I realized that gift has already been given to us.

One of the things that happened when Christ was born was the initiation of the Kingdom of God. Christ made it possible to have the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. What is the Kingdom of God like? Well. No more lives torn apart, everyone would have a friend and love would never end.

Christ gave us the vision for the kingdom and did what he could to start work toward it. Since he was crucified it has been up to his followers to continue the kingdom building work. It’s up to you and me to pray for, and then works towards this world of peace and joy.

If you are familiar with “My Grown Up Christmas List”, you know the first verse goes like this:

Do you remember me?
I sat upon you knee.
I wrote you with childhood fantasies.
Well I’m all grown up now,
and still need help somehow
I’m not a child but my heart can still dream.

As children we focus on ourselves. We want this! We want that! This song reflects maturity in one’s perspective. No longer is the wish for one’s self,

but it is a wish for things that will benefit others. We cannot only wish for this gift, we could do what we can, given our situation, to help it along.

As we enjoy the gift's we received this Christmas, let us consider what we can do to help create the ideal gift. How can we bring more peace, more joy to the world? Christ is doing his part, what can we do?