

Christmas Gift Assessment

For most of our society in the Northern Hemisphere and Europe, gift giving at Christmas time is common among most people, Christian or not. It has become basically a tradition of a holiday season, often given without reference to Jesus Christ. This is primarily connected to the commercialization of what in the past was a holy day associated with God's gift of his Son to a present emphasis on family and Santa myths. Now that the 25th of December has come and gone for another year it is time for an assessment. Here is a question that needs to be answered. What are you left with?

Usually, the question most frequently asked after this holiday is- *What did you get for Christmas?* Then follows a list of possessions one has acquired. Some people even go so far as to compare what they gave to each person and what they got in return to see if they broke even or went in the hole! This kind of reasoning makes Christmas so phony and superficial. The question we should ask is **not**, "What did you get, or what did I get?" **No**. We should ask, *What did I give?* And after the Christmas decorations are removed, *What do I have left?* Is it bills from overspending? Headaches? Maybe unclean and cluttered houses? More useless gifts to add to the last assortment of unneeded and unwanted objects?

Let's do an assessment. Here is the real truth of the matter - *We only have what we gave away.* Naturally, I am not talking about particular objects we gave to others. I am talking about the real giving that must transpire if Christmas is to be more than a holiday extravaganza.

Don't get me wrong. There is nothing wrong with the exchanging of gifts or just plain gifting another. In fact, it can be an appropriate gesture to commemorate the gifting of God's Son to us. Although a more appropriate time for this would be the Epiphany, January 6, when the visitors from the East came months after Jesus' birth. We read in Matthew 2:1ff *After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived unexpectedly in Jerusalem, ² saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."*

After inquiring at the king's court and learning from the priests that Messiah was to arrive in Bethlehem they went on their way. *And there it was—the star they had seen in the east! It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed beyond measure. ¹¹ Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary His*

mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Gift giving can be an empty motion unless it is accompanied by a proper motive and appreciation of the person to whom we are giving the present. Let us ask some hard questions. "Did you give love this Christmas? Was there a heart of care about the person to whom you gave that gift? Was your love and care for them and their needs wrapped up in that package"

You see love is at the heart of the story of Christ's birth. A song says it well – "Love came down at Christmas." The incarnation of the Word of God is the greatest love story ever. It speaks of a people who were cold and indifferent, away from God. But God loved them with an everlasting love. So at just the proper time God came down through the womb of Mary and was made man. ¹⁶For in this way God loved the world, so that he gave his one and only Son, in order that everyone who believes in him will not perish, but will have eternal life. John 3:16 *One and only* here carries the idea of the *unique* Son in a category of his own – "*only begotten*" is another word with similar meaning. ⁹*God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent His One and Only Son into the world so that we might live through Him.* ¹⁰*Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins* (1 John 4:9-10). "Propitiation" is translated "*atoning sacrifice*" in the New International Version.

Did you give kindness and consideration this Christmas? Did you think about each person and attempt to find a gift that would be useful or a reminder of your relationship to that person? God is kind to his people. The psalmist never tired of extolling the kindness, especially the lovingkindness of the Lord. Our God is a God of great kindness.

It was the kindness and love of our God that appeared that first dawn when Jesus was born. God's kindness can then be seen in everything that Jesus did in his ministry. To the sick, the suffering, the hurting, the unclean, Jesus came in lovingkindness to meet their need and restore them to wholeness. It is just a fact that *if you give love and kindness you still have what you gave away!*

Did you give friendship this Christmas or whatever the occasion of your gift? Did you offer anything to those outside your circle such the homeless or the alien or the lonely, that you might have had opportunity? How fitting that we should reach out in true care to others and

give them acts of friendliness such as the giving of a thoughtful gift, by spending time with them, by sharing their needs, and understanding their fears.

God has shown us the true pattern for friendship. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly ... God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6,8). When we were still God's enemies, Christ came into our world and died for us. By this act he reconciled us to God and made us friends to the Almighty.

Jesus called his disciples "friends." This is his gift to us - we have become the friends of the Almighty God in Christ Jesus through faith in his name. *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you* (John 15:13-14). He had defined that in his previous words, *as the Father has loved me, I have loved you. Remain in my love.* John 15:9

"To have friends we must be a friend" is a true maxim of life. I dare say that if you gave friendship this Christmas then you still have friendship as your own possession, as well.

Did you give worship to Jesus Christ this Christmas? This is the greatest gift we can bring him. To fall before him as the hosts of heaven sing, All hail the power of Jesus Name. Glory to God in the highest to our God and King.

As the hymn writer expressed it- "O come to the Father through Jesus the Son. and give him the glory, great things he has done." Jesus declared, *"Whoever does not honor the Son, does not honor the Father who sent him"* (John 5:23b). And Hebrews 1:6 says of God that *"when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."*

If our hearts did not join the shepherds, the angels, and later the Wise Men from the East in offering our attention, our affection and our gifts to the Lord Jesus, then we missed the true meaning behind Christmas. For Christmas is nothing more than the birthday celebration of the coming of Jesus Christ into our world. It would be better and more accurately termed the celebration of the incarnation of the Word. "Come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord." If you offered sincere worship to Jesus, then you have the afterglow of that worship. It is a sense of well being and contentment in your relationship to God in Christ Jesus. And you have experienced the real meaning of Christmas.

Wayne Conrad - December 31, 2021