

What Will You Give for Christmas?

Message for Sunday, December 6, 2015
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

Children's Message: John 3:16-17

I wonder about Christmas — is it nicer to give gifts, or to receive them? What do you think? (*this is a discussion opener... but who knows where it might lead!*)

The very first Christmas gift was when God gave himself to the world. Jesus is God, and he became a human being to show us how much he loves us. He loves us so much he even died on the cross for us.

That was the greatest gift of all — when God gave us himself. Let's try following God's example — let's give ourselves as gifts. Here's how: go up to someone in the church — maybe your parents, maybe your Sunday School teacher, maybe someone else — and give them a great big hug, and say, "I love you."

And after they come back, ask: now, for the rest of today, how can you show that person that you really do love them? (help, listen, etc.)

Message "What will you give for Christmas?"
You know how children can sometimes ask the simplest questions, that require the hardest answers?
Like:

- Where did I come from?
- Where did God come from?
- Why is the colour red red?
- Why is there war?

Following in that vein, I have a simple question for us today: *Why do we give Christmas gifts?* I'm going to split myself into two people, and they are going to have a conversation with each other about this question. Let's listen in and see what happens...

A: Why do we give Christmas gifts?

B: It's a tradition based on what happened when the wise men came to see Jesus. When they

found him, they kneeled before him and worshipped him. Then they open—

A: Why did they worship him? Don't we worship only God?

B: Yes, you're right. But Jesus *is* God, who came to live as a human.

A: How can that be possible?

B: I don't know. But I suppose God can do anything.

A: Hmm. I suppose. But how would they know he was God?

B: I don't know. Maybe the star that they were following, along with the ancient prophets which spoke of a Messiah, told them that this child wasn't just special—he was the Son of God.

A: How could they tell all that from a star?

B: I really don't know. Perhaps it was a unique star, unlike anything they had ever seen before.

A: How could a star way up in the sky tell them exactly which house to go to?

B: I don't know.

A: And if it was so spectacular that it brought them from hundreds of kilometers away, then why didn't the local people notice it?

B: I don't that either. Maybe the local people did notice it, but they didn't know what to make of it.

A: You keep on saying "I don't know." You don't know very much, do you?

B: Yes, that's true.

A: So do you believe all this stuff? Some of it sounds pretty wild.

B: Yes, I do believe it. Would you like to know why?

A: Sure.

B: There are many reasons why I believe the Bible. But the main one is Jesus himself. The things that he said — no one ever talked like that. The things that he did — no one ever did things like that. Then he rose up from the dead — I wouldn't believe that, either, except that I can see how it absolutely changed the lives of the people around him. And finally, I see how he absolutely changes the lives of people in the world today. Yes, I believe it.

A: How did we get onto this?

B: We were talking about the wise men giving gifts.

A: We were?

B: Well, we didn't quite get to that point. As I was saying, when the wise men found Jesus, they kneeled before him and worshipped him. Then they gave him their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

A: Pretty fancy gifts, huh?

B: Yes. And that reminds me of a story. About 100 years ago, the family of a minister went to church for a Christmas party where there was a gift exchange. One daughter received a beautiful and expensive doll. Her sister received a cheap rag doll. The fighting began as soon as they got home. "I want to play with that doll." "You can't—it's mine." "It's not fair!" Their mother settled their fight; but even more, began a new Christmas tradition.

Next year at that church, people were again asked to bring gifts, but not to exchange. They were given as part of their offering to Jesus Christ, and then they were distributed to poor families. Further, the gifts were to be wrapped in plain white paper, as a symbol that the expense of the gift is not the key, but rather what is in the heart of the giver. And that was the origin of what we now call "White Gifts."

A: Hmm. Interesting. Can we read what it actually says in the Bible?

B: Sure. It's in Matthew 2. Here's the part where the wise men actually find Jesus:

Matthew 2:9-11, New Living Translation:

After this interview the wise men went their way. Once again the star appeared to them, guiding them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house where the child and his mother, Mary, were, and they fell down before him and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

A: So they gave Christmas gifts to Jesus?

B: Right.

A: And the reason we call this "Christmas" is because it's all about Jesus Christ?

B: Right.

A: Which brings me back to my original question: why do we give gifts to one another? Shouldn't we be giving them to Jesus?

B: You're not going to like this...

A: Maybe. Try me.

B: Giving Christmas gifts is a tradition. I suppose I could find some history book that would explain how and why it all started long ago. But as for why we do it today, the real reason is tradition.

A: Well, now we're getting somewhere.

B: At least it's a nice tradition.

A: Oh, I agree. I don't think there's anything wrong with traditions. I was just curious, that's all.

B: Of course, things have a way of getting out of hand. What may have started as a simple way of showing love has turned into a huge multi-billion dollar industry, with TV specials, greeting cards, advertising, parades and even it's own mascot.

A: You mean the big guy in red?

B: Right.

A: That one little episode in the life of Jesus started all this?

B: No, people started it. Jesus certainly didn't start it.

A: So that's why all you preachers are always telling people "Jesus is the reason for the season" and "Keep Christ in Christmas"?

B: Right. I think it's important to remember what Christmas is all about — when God came to earth as a human being, to live as one of us, to show us his love, and to die for us.

A: I agree. It reminds me of a story I heard.

B: Oh? I'd like to hear it.

A: A little girl asked, "Mommy, what is Christmas?" Her mother carefully explained that Christmas is Jesus' birthday. "Then why do we not give gifts to Jesus if it's *his* birthday?" The mother explained the tradition of exchanging Christmas gifts as expressions of our love for each other, and that seemed to end the matter.

It did not come up again until Christmas Eve when a sleepy little girl placed a package under the Christmas tree on her way to bed and explained that it was a birthday gift for Jesus which she was sure he would open during the night while she slept. After she was asleep, the mother; not wanting her daughter to be disappointed, opened the clumsily wrapped package and found the box empty.

On Christmas morning the little girl was thrilled to find the package had been opened and her gift was gone. "What was in it?" asked the confused mother. "It was a box full of love," came the answer.

B: Sounds to me like a fine way to celebrate Christmas. I wonder, what can I offer to Jesus?

Answer in prayer after message:

Romans 12:1-2, Today's English Version:

So then, my friends, because of God's great mercy to us I appeal to you: Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer. Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God—what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect.

Next Steps:

- Read again that passage from Romans 12:1-2. Circle any words that grab your attention.
- Pray about it: ask Jesus how you can give yourself to him.
- Then do it!