

The Greatest Gift

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John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world that He gave . . ."

This is the message of Christmas! It is God's gift to the world that attaches meaning to our tradition of exchanging Christmas gifts. It is in giving, as God gave, that we discover the true spirit of Christmas.

Let us meditate for a moment on what it was that God gave the world that first Christmas.

God Gave the World a Savior

God even named the child who was to be conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. The child's name declared to the world that God had provided a Savior: *"You shall call his name Jesus; for he will save his people from their sins"* (Matt. 1:21).

For thousands of years mankind had been held captive in sin. They were under the wrath of God who must judge all sin. There was no escape. Yet God continued to promise, through His prophets, the coming of One who would take on Himself all of God's anger against sin; One who could give us His righteousness in exchange for our wickedness.

Oh, God's gift was the gift of all gifts! The Savior! The Redeemer! The Liberator! Without this gift we had no hope. We were doomed to die in our sin, forever separated from God, and objects of His fierce wrath. Now, we can approach Him boldly, clothed in the righteousness of the Savior. Let us gratefully and humbly receive God's gift. Let us daily shout psalms of praise, *"For you have delivered my soul from death"* (Ps. 56:13). The Savior has been given!

God Gave the World His Glory

Throughout the Old Testament, God could not show His glory to man, for man in his sinful state would die if exposed to God's presence. *"And he said, 'You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live'"* (Ex. 33:20). In anticipation of the first Christmas, God promised, *"The glory of the Lord shall*

be revealed" (Isa. 40:5). And indeed, Jesus is *"he is the radiance of the glory of God, and the exact imprint of his nature"* (Heb. 1:3). Jesus is EMMANUEL—God with us: God incarnate—God in the flesh.

At Christmas, the infinite God became a man, taking on the limitations of time and space, that we might behold and receive His glory. Contemplate with rejoicing that divine step out of eternity onto this planet of sinful men. *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth . . . And from his fullness we have all we received, and grace upon grace"* (John 1:14, 16). It is beholding Jesus, the glory of God, that we are transformed into His likeness, and become partakers of His glory. *"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another . . ."* (2 Cor. 3:18).

God Gave the World His Peace

Oh, how desperately this world was in need of peace. Men, because of their sin, were at enmity with themselves, with each other, and with God. Many sought for peace in philosophy, in spiritual works, and in human leaders. But none could bridge the infinite gap between God and man. Once again, God had promised to send the Man of Peace. *"From you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel . . ."* (Micah 5:2). The night Jesus was born, the angels proclaimed, *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth PEACE among those with whom he is pleased"* (Luke 2:14).

The apostle Paul personally experienced the great truth revealed to him by the Holy Spirit: *"But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility . . ."* (Eph. 2:13,14). With the birth of the baby Jesus, came also the promise that someday King Jesus would return to earth to establish forever His kingdom of peace. God's peace has been given. In this world we have trouble and conflict, but those of us who have received the Prince of Peace, may daily experience the sweet, victorious peace of God.

God Gave the World His Only Son

Do you remember the words of Abraham as he and Isaac began the three day climb up Mt. Moriah where Abraham was to sacrifice to God the most precious

thing in his life—his only son? Abraham spoke to his servants and said, “Stay here . . . I and the boy will go over there to worship and come again to you” (Gen. 22:5).

Two thousand years later, God and His only Son, Jesus, climbed another mountain together. Bethlehem marked only the beginning of a journey that was to lead to Calvary and end at the empty tomb. Between the manger and the empty tomb, a great sacrifice had to be made. When God gave Jesus on that first Christmas, He knew that the complete sacrifice of His beloved Son would be required. Yet He gave Him up willingly.

And the Son willingly gave Himself up for the world. *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich”* (2 Cor. 8:9). This is true giving! How selfish our giving seems to be by comparison. We need to learn to give as He gave—sacrificially, to the point of poverty, that others might be made spiritually rich.

Christmas provides a wonderful opportunity to join with God in giving to the world. The most precious gifts we can give each other, our children, our friends, and even those whom we do not know, are those gifts that let others share in God's gift—His Savior, His glory, His peace, **His Son**.