



“On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.” (Matthew 2:11)

Who likes presents?! Well we all do of course. Jesus as a baby might not have been in a position to appreciate what the Magi (or wise men or kings or whatever title you wish to give them!) presented to him but Mary who is described by Luke as pondering all these events in her heart (Luke 2:19) surely wondered what it all meant.

My pondering on this familiar Christmas story leads me to ask the question, why do we give presents? I have come up with 4 suggestions, none of which are particularly original but maybe they can be borne in mind as we read and hear the account of this visit once again this year.

- We give gifts to honour people, sometimes for services rendered (long-service awards for example) or sometimes just because of who they are (such as gifts given to a head of state on an official visit). Jesus is certainly deserving on both counts.
- We give gifts for a specific purpose, such as if a child is beginning school, they might be given a satchel. These three gifts all have significance, the gold acknowledging Jesus as a king, the incense the fact that he was also God and the myrrh looking ahead to his death,

ultimately the reason that he came into this world. I am not sure that we can quite give Jesus gifts in this category but we can share in our hearts what the Magi presented and that leads us on to my next thought.

- We give gifts to give thanks. We, as Christians, should do this constantly, whether it is financial donations to the church and Christian work or giving our time and talents to Christ's service. We talk about 'giving our life to Jesus' when we become a Christian. The way we live should be in thankfulness to him.
- We give gifts because we love someone. Sometimes we just give a gift for no reason other than that. I do not know what the Magi knew of Jesus or believed about him but as Christians we say we love Jesus. We should be giving our all to him.

God encourages us to be generous (2 Corinthians 9:7 being the most famous verse in that regard) and he has proved himself time and again to be generous beyond anything we could ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20) so I challenge us all to give and receive generously this Christmas.



Your will be done

Whenever a death, a disaster or a disappointment occurs, there is sure to be someone who will say the words "It was the will of God." Even in Insurance Policies the words 'Act of God' express an occurrence that no-one has control over, so that the resulting catastrophe could not have been insured against. When saying 'Your Will be Done' are we lazily thinking "Well, there's

nothing I can do about the state of the world, it is not my problem”. Are we priding ourselves on humbly accepting a horrible situation, of whatever kind? Perhaps we are trying to be resigned to anything sad or bad, while secretly wondering why God has allowed these things to happen? And deep down, maybe we feel that he has deliberately aimed the danger or tragedy at Us, who are (we think) good people and do not deserve all this trouble? If so, I believe we should think again.

Would a God who loves us actually choose to make us the victims of misery? Does he really say to himself, “I would like John Smith to have a debilitating illness for several years”? Do we truly believe that he takes pleasure in the unhappiness of the beings he has created?

One of the guides that Jesus gave us, in response to his disciples saying “Teach us to pray” was the Lord’s Prayer, in all its simplicity. Notice that the words ‘Your Kingdom come’ precede ‘Your will be done’ and this gives us a clue. If we accept that Jesus clearly showed that his life on earth introduced the beginning of the Kingdom of God, we, as followers of Jesus, know that we can choose to take part in its growth, and to do so, we need to pay attention to his instructions. He does not promise an easy life to anyone. But he speaks the truth, because he is the Truth. We will have tribulation. We will be hated. We will upset the authorities. We may suffer. But think about the mother of Jesus, who chose to say Yes, she would do what God asked of her. Think of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, saying “Not my will, but yours be done.” He had to be obedient, not just by sitting back and saying these words, but by allowing all that followed to be done to him.

Sometimes I am afraid that many Christians think of themselves as puppets, with God ‘up above’ pulling the strings to make us act in the way he wants. On the contrary, he did indeed give us free will. Instead of ‘making us dance to his tune’ he delights in seeing us turn to him of our own accord. We cannot see the big picture but only the small section in which we have a tiny part to play. In the Old Testament, the prophets draw attention to the turmoil, battles and hatred between nations. They did this to show the results of not living in the way that would forward the kingdom of God. They knew it was not what God wanted. In Colossians 1:13 Paul puts it this way: ‘He has delivered us

from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son ...' But he did not force us to choose this path, we have the option to say No. As we approach Christmas let us turn away from the endless repetition of bitterness and revenge that we see in the unbelieving world, and instead welcome the Good News by saying "We are already seeing your Kingdom come. Let us join in to help it on its way". How can you and I do that? We have daily instructions, if we look and listen for them. Today this is called 'Walking the Talk'. We shall soon be singing carols and thinking about Christ's birth. Let me repeat some words I found two years ago, written by Saint Augustine: - "Sing as travellers sing along the road, but keep on walking"

Jenny Lay

With acknowledgments to The Bell, Christchurch, Harare

A Christmas poem

When the song of the angels is stilled
When the star in the sky is gone
When the kings and princes are home
When the shepherds are back with their flocks
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost
To heal the broken
To feed the hungry
To release the prisoner
To rebuild the nations
To bring peace among the people
To make music in the heart.

- **Howard Thurman**

Christmas and eternity

But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1:12 NLT, second edition)

Turn on your television or surf the Web this Christmas, and you’ll discover all sorts of Christmas messages. But for the One who invented Christmas — God — there’s only one message that really matters.

God wants to share eternity with you.

That’s what Christmas is all about. You weren’t created just to live 80 or 90 years on Earth and then die. You’re far more valuable than that to God. God has some long-range plans for you. He made you to live forever.

One day your heart will stop. That’ll be the end of your heart, but it won’t be the end of you. You’ll last for eternity — trillions of years! And God wants you to be a part of his family.

He sent Jesus to Earth as a baby so one day he could die for your sins, and then you can spend forever with him.

That’s the great news of Christmas. This offer is available to anyone. The Bible says of Jesus, *“But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God”* (John 1:12 NLT, second edition).

God wants to spend eternity with you, so he made the way to him simple: *You believe, and you receive*. You believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins, and you receive him into your life. God sent his Son to Earth 2015 years ago to die for you. That's God's very first Christmas gift, sent to you thousands of years before you were even born.

Honestly, celebrating Christmas and not receiving the number one gift God has for you is dumb. Do that, and you're missing the point entirely. Acts 10:35 says, "*It makes no difference who you are or where you're from — if you want God and are ready to do as he says, the door is open*" (MSG).

No matter what you've done or where you've been, you've got a place in God's forever family ready and waiting for you. The invitation is *wide open*. Just believe and receive.

Are you ready? What are you waiting for?

Rick Warren www.purposedriven.com

Knee Polishing

In the traditional Christian year, December is the period of Advent when we prepare ourselves, not just for the celebration of Christ's birth but also look ahead to his coming again. Here are some ideas of how we can prayerfully prepare ourselves this month

Sunday : prepare ourselves for holy celebration

Monday : prepare ourselves to be generous

Tuesday : help prepare other people to be ready for Christ's second coming
Wednesday : prepare ourselves for judgment
Thursday : prepare ourselves for service
Friday : prepare ourselves for thankfulness to God and other people
Saturday : prepare ourselves to know Jesus better

Here is a helpful article that I found about Advent

<https://www.christianity.com/wiki/holidays/what-is-advent.html>

Cryptic Christmas Card

A man sent his friend a cryptic Christmas card. It said: A B C D E F G H I J K
M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z. The recipient puzzled over it for weeks,
finally gave up and wrote asking for an explanation. In July he received the
explanation on a postcard: "No L."

No Room In The Inn?

A boy wanted to be Joseph in the Sunday School pageant. He was cast as the
landlord and objected loudly, but to no avail. When the pageant was
presented, Mary and Joseph knocked on the door and asked him if he had a
room for them. The boy smiled and said, "Yes, sure. Lots of room. Come on
in!"

EDITORS : Richard Harrison and Tony Bancroft
Falcon College, Esigodini
Tel : 09-881249/881268/881269
Email : rharrison@falconcollege.com