

Tuesday December 24, 2019

Isaiah 9:2-7

Luke 2:1-20

The Gift Exchange

Maybe tonight or most likely tomorrow most of you will be sitting with family and opening gifts purchased because of tradition, love or necessity. There will be exclamations of “not more clothes”, or why did you buy me this?, or even thank you. The idea of exchanging gifts at Christmas is not something that started by big business corporations to increase sales in the last quarter of the year. The idea of the gift exchange began well before Christmas celebrations were observed and even before that night of Jesus’ birth.

But there is something about sharing gifts that may cause us to wonder why we do this at all. Why is it important to express our feelings for others as we share gifts in both tangible and intangible ways. Just what is the meaning of the gift exchange and is there something about it that helps us to express faith, love and hope?

O Henry wrote “The Gift of the Magi” a short story in 1905 and it has been received as a classic story of gifts and of love.

“On Christmas Eve, Della only has \$1.87 in savings with which to buy a gift for her husband Jim. She has counted the money over and over again but it was still only \$1.87. What does she do? She sobs and flops down on the couch in their small apartment. It is the early 1900’s and she knows that she and her husband have been struggling to make ends meet. Jim was earning \$30/ week and yet when it was shrunk to \$20/week there was barely anything left over to buy anything extravagant. Della wants to buy something fine, rare and sterling- something to give to her husband whom she loves so much. But what? Della and Jim were proud of two things they owned. One was Jim’s gold watch he inherited from his father and the other was Della’s beautiful long hair.

She knew what she could do. She left the apartment and went to a shop which sold hair articles of all kinds. Della asked the shopkeeper if she would buy her hair. For \$20 she cut and sold her hair to the shopkeeper.

With some time left, Della went to buy the perfect gift for her husband. She believed it was made for Jim and no one else. It was a gold watch chain- valuable, pure, plain and simple. She paid the \$21 and went home with 87c. She took curling irons and worked on a new hairstyle. She prepare supper and waited for her husband to come home.

When Jim entered the apartment, he was bewildered. She told him that she cut and sold her hair in order for her to give him a gift. He then held Della in his arms. He then pulled out the gift he had purchased for her. It was a set of expensive fancy combs she had longed for to hold up her hair. Offer her give to him, he opened it up to discover the gold chain for his watch. They both sat down and smiled. He then explained that he had sold the watch to get eh money to buy the combs. Della and Jim sat quietly together and ate their dinner for they each realized that they bought each other gifts that they could not use despite their sacrifices. And they each realized how much they truly loved each other by what they had done in order to make the other happy.

Tonight we celebrate another exchange of gifts. We read in John 3:16-17 “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son. That whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

God’s gift to the world-is Jesus. God heard the cries of his people that they be saved from their sins. He inspired the prophets to write about the coming of the Messiah. And then God fulfilled this promise through Mary and Joseph. The incarnation that is the time when God himself became human began the night of Jesus’ birth into the world of human history.

Isaiah wrote that the people were wandering in darkness and they needed someone to light their way to live rightly and according to God’s way. “A child would be born for us because God would give His Son to save us.” He would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.. It is upon him, this Son of God that there will be justice, righteousness and hope for all.

Four hundred or more years later, Emperor Augustus issued a decree that everyone living in the whole region needed to be registered in order to take a census. This registration would take place and everyone had to go back to where they had been born. This meant that Joseph betrothed to Mary had to go to Bethlehem. But the situation was that Mary was pregnant and coming to her time to deliver. This baby she carried was conceived by the Spirit and she knew this baby would be born soon.

God’s gift to the world came on what we celebrate as Christmas- a day to rejoice, be happy, give and receive gifts and feast together. But in the spirit of Christmas, what gift are you giving in exchange? It is Jesus’ birthday but what are you giving Him?

Jesus was born into a world that had problems much like the ones with which we still face today. We often imagine that the world to which Jesus came was not complicated not complex. But when reflect on the words that Jesus shared as he taught his disciples he stated, "I have come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly" People of all time and generations have fallen short of God's ideal way of life. As humans we sin but as God gives—and as Jesus taught, "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven."

When God gifted us Jesus, Jesus became Immanuel—God with us and we were and are given a choice- to reciprocate a gift to God.. This is the second part of the gift exchange—we give ourselves to God. When we choose to do this, we seek forgiveness of all sins in our past and we are changed because Jesus died on the cross and rose from death. We become members of God's family, God's children in faith and citizens of heaven

In the words of Saint Francis de Sales, "By giving yourself to God, you not only receive God in Christ in exchange, but eternal life as well."

The gifts exchanged between Della and Jim symbolized their love for each other. God loves you for who you are. Are you will to love God and offer yourself to Him? If so, the Spirit of Christmas will enlighten you and cause you to reach out to others as you learn to live Christ's way. As you reach out to others who know Jesus as Saviour, you will receive anew, the gifts of hope, peace, joy and love. The question is are you willing to share in the gift exchange of Christmas?

LET US PRAY:

Holy God of love we praise you and thank you for your Gift to us in Jesus. The baby born in a stable, who becomes the Resurrected Christ. Hear our prayers this Holy Night as we offer ourselves to you in exchange for your unconditional love and the promise of eternal life. Hear us as we pray to you. SILENCE. We offer ourselves to you. Amen.