

Dec. 26, 2010, First Sunday of Christmas

John 1:1-18, Hebrews 2:10-18

## The Gift of Jesus Christ

Christmas is all about gifts. We shop for just the right gift for everyone on our list. We think about what we might like to get, but I think most of us put far more effort into shopping for just the right gifts for other people.

Over the past couple of weeks I think most of us have asked someone else the question, "Have you finished your Christmas shopping yet?", and just about all of us have been asked the same question.

---break for translation-----

It's been on everyone's mind. Everyone has been busy shopping and wrapping and shipping and putting gifts under the tree. Only after we were finished shopping, we could find time for cooking and cleaning and baking, but the shopping was the priority!

So now that Christmas is over, I want to know---did you find just the right gift for everyone on your list? And did you get what you really wanted?

----break for translation----

In the time of Jesus, many people wanted one thing and one thing only----they wanted the Messiah to come and liberate them from the Romans. They were highly taxed, controlled by Roman soldiers, and ruled by the puppet king Herod, who was ruthless, selfish, and cruel.

---break for translation----

They were losing hope that they would ever be free. They were finding it hard to believe that God still loved them. They wanted to live in peace and to rediscover the joy that had gone out of their lives.

They wanted

Hope. Love. Peace. Joy.

----break for translation----

What did you really want for Christmas?

Today there are people living in poverty everywhere in the world. People who have no clean water to drink. People who live in the middle of war and people who have been devastated by natural disasters.

----break for translation----

Even in our own community we know there are people who have experienced tragedy and violence, people who struggle to put food on the table and pay their rent or their mortgage. All around us are people who live on the streets, who cannot find work, who cannot afford to see a doctor when they are sick, and who have nothing more than the clothes on their backs.

---break for translation---

What these people wanted for Christmas might seem obvious---a place to live, a job, enough money for a doctor.

But what is it that YOU wanted for Christmas?

---break for translation----

Some of us are grieving for lost loved ones. Others may be praying that relatives will be able to come to this country soon.

Some of us here today may be hungry and in danger of losing our homes.

Some of us may feel that no one loves us. Some of us may be on the edge of despair or living with depression or other mental illness. Some of us may not know what to do with the rest of our lives, and feel lost and alone.

---break for translation---

For Christmas, we might have wanted money or medicine or a job or someone who loves us to come into our lives.

Some of us may have other problems---having trouble paying the bills each month, praying that the car doesn't break down because there is no money for repairs.

Anxiety over money or other issues steals our peace.

Health problems may be a heavy burden that steals our hope and joy.

Family problems may threaten to consume us, stealing our love.

----break for translation----

There are so many struggles, so much suffering in so many different ways, that our hope, love, peace, and joy are gone.

And that is what ALL of us really wanted for Christmas---

Hope, love, peace, and joy!

----break for translation----

This morning we heard two scripture passages that tell us about Christ coming to live among people here on earth.

Both of the readings point out that Christ became flesh and blood to be like us. Hebrews tells us that Christ destroyed the one who had the power of death, setting us free from the fear of death.

----break for translation---

The fear of death holds us captive until we accept the truth that Christ has set us free. All of our worries and anxieties are related to this fear of death.

----break for translation---

We worry that we will die unloved, homeless, unknown, forgotten. We are afraid that our lives have no meaning and we will not make a difference in this world. We are afraid that we will never see our lost loved ones again and that everyone whom we love will also die, leaving us alone.

We are anxious that we are not good enough for our lives to have meaning, not worthy of being loved, not capable of accomplishing anything worth remembering after we die.

----break for translation---



There is a saying --- “Life is hard, and then you die.” There’s also an old song that asks “Is that all there is?”

Is that all there is, that life is hard and then you die?

----break for translation---

The gift that Christ brings to us is life being hard is NOT all there is! Life is indeed hard and yes, our bodies are going to die!

But that’s not all there is!

----break for translation---

Christ has defeated the one who had the power of death, and he has saved us so that we are his brothers and sisters, all of us beloved children of God!

This gives us reason for hope!

It assures us that God loves us!

It calms our fears and takes away our worries, giving us peace.

And all of this brings us great joy!

Hope, love, peace, and joy!

----break for translation---

The Word became flesh and dwelled among us,  
full of grace and truth. And so we have seen the glory of God!  
We know what God is like because God became flesh and  
blood in the person of Jesus Christ.

----break for translation---

The Holy became human.

The invisible and intangible became visible and touchable.

The Word of God became the light of the world, shining in the  
darkness.

In the darkness of grief, Christ brings us comfort.

In the darkness of violence, Christ brings compassion and  
healing.

In the darkness of despair, Christ brings the truth that God is  
with us.

In the darkness of fear, Christ brings the power to overcome even death itself.

----break for translation---

A single candle can defeat the darkness of a whole room.

The light of the world has defeated the sin and death of the whole world.

All we need to do is to accept the gifts of Hope, Love, Peace, and Joy that Christ has brought us.

----break for translation---

All we have to do is to believe that Christ is God's son, the source of truth and grace in our lives.

All we have to do is to believe that God so loved the world that he sent his only son our Lord so that we might be freed from death and have eternal life.

Free from fear and death. Free from sin and darkness.

Free to be the people that God created us to be, free of the chains of the past and the fear of the future!

----break for translation---

Free to have hope for the future. Free to know beyond the shadow of a doubt that we are loved by the almighty God.

Free to find the peace of God and stop being anxious.

And when we are free in Christ, we will know the joy of being children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ!

And this, I believe, is what every person really wanted for Christmas! This freedom that brings hope, love, peace, and joy!

----break for translation---

These gifts come to us in the person of Jesus Christ through the grace of God in the truth of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

It's the day after Christmas, but it's not too late to receive these gifts.

Open your heart, and open these gifts. And be grateful that the Word became flesh and dwelled among us, full of grace and truth.

Amen.