

*Sharing the Gift* (Luke 2:20)

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*And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

Christmas is a time of sharing and Advent is a time of intentional preparation to share. We share many kinds of gifts between family and friends but as Christians we make an extra effort to share the Good News of Christmas that God, who loves all of us, sent His only Son into the world to be our Saviour.

When we hear the Nativity story again, we feel its joy pulsate in our veins. The Good News of Christ's birth is infectious and that is what happened with the shepherds, and we like them cannot keep this news to ourselves. When we realize the meaning and the magnitude of the event, it overflows our hearts and touches the lives of others.

After the shepherds went and saw the Christ child, they reflected upon the significance of what they had heard and seen, then they returned to their flocks glorifying and praising God. Love had burst in their hearts and they had to share their joy with the rest of the world. They could not keep still and they could not keep silent. The excitement that gripped them made them share the news of Baby Jesus with everyone they met. I think the Feast of Christ is still like that today. When we hear, *O Holy Night*, or see a child putting up their stocking; if we feel the warmth of a fireplace or smell a fresh-cut Christmas tree; when we see the adornments of Christmas in our homes, up and down the streets, in the stores and in church, something happens within us. The world seems to be transformed and bathed in something new. For a few weeks the routines become miraculously transformed.

Most people say they feel happier and their countenances are brighter. The world seems to be a nicer place and it is easier to treat more people with love. Something happens to us a Christmas and we discover great reservoirs of good will and generosity in our hearts. Old prejudices, old wells of cantankerousness are neutralized. Sharpness is now smoothness. Pain yields toward a willingness to forget or set aside. And where there was inertia, there is now a spiritual dynamism. At Christmas the hearts of millions are transformed with a new wondrous energy that is released. There is a compelling desire to share the love of Christ with others.

Paul said, *Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift.* (2Cor 9:15). This is the spark plug of Christmas joy and love; the realization that God's love is not hidden, nor hard to find. It is not an empty promise; it is not an illusion but is a tangible reality that took on human flesh in a manger some 2,000+ years ago.

***THANKS BE TO GOD FOR HIS INEXPRESSIBLE GIFT.*** Paul understood that in Jesus, God gave the world the gift of salvation and long suffering. Instead of commandments carved in cold stone, God sent the world the most intimate and tangible gift, the gift of his only begotten Son. Can there be a gift more valuable, more loving and more inexpressible?

We like Paul are swept away by the feeling of joy and gratitude. Because we have been so generously loved by God in Christ, we are compelled to love those around us. God entered human history in the form of a compassionate, suffering servant, and in that act, an ever-lengthening chain reaction of love was begun in human hearts. If you understand and revere the love behind Jesus' birth, you cannot help but be more loving

yourself. It is an inescapable cause and effect principle of Christmas that the measure of its meaning to you is the degree to which you will go to share Christ's love. Paul needed to share the Lord's love that so much he traveled great distances around the then known world three times. It is with some sense of sadness that there are so many celebrating the modern Christmas who do not understand the cherished privilege to give as God has given to them.

There is a lot in our culture that discourages conscientious Christians from being generous givers. The spirit of Christmas gift-giving is often handled unevenly. Our society is caught up in a tension between materialism and spirituality, between the gifts and the reason for the feast of Christ. I believe the exchange of gifts, even expensive ones can be a vehicle for sharing Christ with each other. Each person has a personal measure of what it means to act out of generosity. It doesn't matter the price of the gift, if it is bought or hand made, comes from the Bay or the Dollar Store, what matters most is how generously you give of yourself. The concern is, personal generosity. Many well know the expression; *it is the thought that counts!* I sometimes wonder how often some people put this dictum to work as a rationalization to cover up, even for themselves. In the final analysis, the giver and the gift are inseparable elements that measure the depth of Jesus' love which is shared.

I do not want to imply that material gifts are the only worthwhile ways to share Christ's love. A world without spiritual sharing at Christmas would be less than livable, less than worthwhile and considerably less Christian. Everyone of us has the power to make a multitude of spiritual presents, to people known and unknown, to people seen and unseen. Everyday innumerable opportunities are afforded us to be generous to share the love of Jesus Christ. When I was in seminary, I traveled from a multi-point charge on the Ontario on the Quebec border north of Ottawa. I flew; I rode the train and the bus and sometimes drove myself or rode with someone else. There were numerous times when the person sitting in the seat next to me would begin a conversation with what I was doing, and that would lead to a discussion that I was studying and my belief in Jesus Christ. An hour on the plane, train or bus became as a few minutes while discussing our faith so much so, I often accomplished little or no personal reading or studying during the trip. You do not need to know how to start a conversation. What you need is to not to be ashamed of the response you will give when the opportunity opens before you. The list of spiritual gifts at our disposal is inexhaustible.

-there is the gift of praise. Be quick to commend and slow to condemn. A spoken compliment means a lot.

-there is the gift of patience when someone is fumbling. Curb impatience and help that person do better the next time.

-there is the gift loyalty. Give someone a reason to feel they can trust you implicitly. The person may need to lean on that trust one day.

-there is the gift of inspiration. Plant seeds of courage and encouragement to action in other people's hearts and help them to strive for great accomplishment and lasting satisfaction.

-there is the gift of personal presence. In sickness, trouble or joy, there is nothing equal to your just being there to share.

Not everyone looks forward to Christmas. You probably know at least one person who will find this year's festive season particularly difficult; those who have recently

experienced a death in their family; those who have family difficulties, depression, loneliness, poor health, financial or legal embarrassment or the loss of their job. For some people it will be difficult to ask them to check if their glass is half full or half empty. We all need to remember our friends in the community perhaps more intentionally this year and make a special effort to reach out to them and include them in our celebration thoughts, activities and prayers.

Christmas is the season of extra mile generosity and the season for sharing Jesus Christ as completely as possible with your family, friends, neighbours and even complete strangers. Be filled with enthusiasm and joy. Know that in your generosity, Christ is born again in you. Make your place in God's ever lengthening chain reaction of love in this world. Be a giver of many kinds of gifts. Be a generous soul.

Let something snap in your life this Christmas season, during the Advent preparation and on the day of celebration Rejoice along with Paul, ***Thanks be to God for inexpressible gift!*** Share Jesus Christ as did the shepherds. Amen.