

Christmas Present (Advent 2011 Series)
What Do You Give to the God Who Has Everything?

3 of 3

Matthew 1:18-25

3rd Sunday of Advent

12 11 2011 Sam Jones Memorial UMC

Christmas Present

Today we are continuing our Advent Worship Series entitled *Christmas Present*. We've seen how the title has a twofold meaning. "Present" can refer to the gifts that we give and receive during the holiday season. However, "present" also has a temporal meaning—what happens in the here and now between the past and the future.

We began by considering the presents we give to others with *28 Days of Gifts*. Last week we went *Shopping for Ourselves*. Today we consider the question: *What do you give to the God who has EVERYTHING?*

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25

A Baby Changes Everything

A baby changes everything.

From the moment an EPT reads positive or a doctor confirms a pregnancy, parents' lives are forever altered. They can no longer think in terms of "I" but of "we." Marriage might change your life but parenthood transforms your world. With the birth of a child, parents are forever hostages to the future.

Isn't it amazing **what a baby can make us do**? Mothers and fathers sacrifice for their children in ways they could not have imagined beforehand. They forgo sleep, endure 2:00 a.m. feedings, survive colic and earaches, change toxic diapers, insert thermometers in unmentionable places, wear spit-up, and taste Gerber green beans.

And it's not just parents. I have watched the most reserved, sensible, sophisticated, rough, and gruff people make complete fools out of themselves when talking to an infant. Preachers have been known to do this, too! We goo-goo and gah-gah, making faces and gestures that no one—especially the baby—understands!

However, we intuitively understand that it is less what is said and more what is felt that is important. Love has a language all its own. Love needs no explanation—it simply is. When a mother or father says, "Coochie, coochie, coo," the child clearly hears the words, "I love you."

(Note: part of the section on "Baby Talk" here and later in the sermon were taken from various sermons on the Internet in re to Martin Luther's quote. Since the same material appeared on multiple sites, I was unable to determine the original source.)

The Babe of Bethlehem

A baby changes everything.

Today is the third Sunday of **Advent** in the church calendar. Advent literally means “*arrival*.” During this four week season prior to Christmas, we anticipate celebrating the birth of God’s own Son.

At **Christmas**, “*God’s Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*” (John 1:12) The Incarnation is the cosmic event into which even “*the angels long to peer.*” (1 Peter 1:12)

The Creator of the heavens and the earth came among us as a baby. The infinite, eternal Son of God wrapped in flesh and swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. Emmanuel: God with us.

The church fathers and mothers put it this way: “*God became who we are so that we might become who God is.*” The Almighty spoke to us in a way we could understand. With the shepherds and angelic host, we gather on Christmas Day to hear the Christ child coo and gurgle in the manger.

A baby changes everything.

Martin Luther was a Roman Catholic priest who sparked the Protestant Reformation during the 16th century. He made this intriguing statement: “*When God speaks to humanity, God always speaks in baby talk.*” Our heavenly Father does this because God is love. Our Lord never forgets that no matter how big we become—how old, educated, or sophisticated—we are still little, helpless, dependent babies when it comes to our faith.

We sing about the “*Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible, hid from our eyes.*” However, this same God bends to our infirmities and meets us where we are. When our Heavenly Father speaks, he only tells us what we can understand—our finite minds can only handle so much. The Creator knows the needs and limits of his children, so God speaks to us in “baby talk.”

Isn’t it amazing what the **babe of Bethlehem** can make us do? Over the past weeks, anticipating the celebration of Christ’s birth has turned our world topsy-turvy. God’s light has lit up the world in colors of white, gold, red, and green. We have gathered in this pace, singing carols that celebrate the good news of Jesus’ birthday.

In grace-filled moments, we will do anything in the world to make our Savior smile. Repent of evil. Do good. Forgive a grudge. Pray for an enemy. Lay down our own interests for others. Give to the poor. Serve the church. Share our faith. Bring our children to Sunday School. Read the Bible.

What Do You Give to the God Who Has Everything?

Our world has watered down Advent and Christmas into a meaningless, secular celebration. However, the holidays are actually holy days that recognize that God has invaded our world. Christ’s coming elicits from each of us a response.

We all have people on our Christmas list who are difficult to buy for; but what do you give to the God who has everything? Perhaps a better question is what do you give to the God who has given us everything? What gift can we bring, what present, what token to our Lord? How can we respond to such divine grace and love in our lives?

The Lord God Almighty certainly doesn't need our material gifts. In Psalm 50: 8-11, God said to Israel:

*I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices
Or your burnt offerings, which are ever before me.
I have no need of a bull from your stall or goats from your pens,
For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.
I know every bird in the mountains and the creatures of the field are mine.*

Stewardship reminds us that ALL that we have is a lifelong loan from the Lord. Our financial faithfulness is only a partial response to such divine grace. Even our finest gifts to God are but poor tokens of our lives. Thank God that it is not the financial worth of the gift that gives its value but the spirit with which it is given.

Every parent knows the truth of this statement. During December, young children are busy at school, church, and home crafting special presents for their moms and dads. The gifts are crafted from construction paper, Elmer's glue, popsicle sticks, glitter, ribbon, tinsel, tingle, tape, pipe cleaners, crayons, cotton balls, and beads. However, they are given with all the love of a child's heart which transforms the gifts into something precious and irreplaceable.

In the same way, our rudimentary efforts are stewardship hint at our love for God. Like children, we bring our best efforts to God, and our Heavenly Father receives them with appreciation and joy.

The Gift of Our Lives

To the God who has everything, we are ultimately called to give nothing less than the **entirety of our lives**. Our heavenly Father will accept nothing less. We are called to proclaim Jesus Christ not only the Savior but also the Lord of our lives.

Hear the unlikely, unsophisticated, uncomplicated, unexpected, unlikely good news of the gospel message: The Lord God Almighty, the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth, is head over heels in love with His Creation. God loves you and me with a love beyond all human imagination.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." However, never forget that such love calls for a **response**: *"that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*

During the sixth century, the church devised a new way of keeping time that was based on Jesus' birth. In Latin, the era before the Incarnation was designated as BC which translates as *"Before Christ."* The years after Jesus' birth were designated as AD, which is shorthand for the Latin phrase *"Anno Domini"* or *"In the Year of Our Lord."*

In our politically correct world, there has been a movement over the past decades to change the designations BC and AD to BCE and CE which stand for *"Before Common Era"* and *"Common Era;"* however, it still uses the same years! Who do they think they are fooling?!?

Christ's coming into the world forever divided history. The Incarnation of God as a helpless infant transformed the very fabric of the cosmos. Not only the world but each Christian life is divided into two eras: BC and AD.

Ubiquity is a word we seldom—if ever—use in our daily conversations. Synonyms for the word include omnipresence, pervasiveness, and universality. The simplest definition is a state of being everywhere at all times. Reflecting on God's ubiquity or omnipresence, Frederick Buechner wrote:

Every automobile bears on its license plate a number that represents the number of years that have elapsed since the birth of Christ. This is a powerful symbol of the ubiquity of God and the indifference of humanity. (Wishful Thinking, p. 94)

Our society has commercialized the meaning out of the holiday season. The church has sentimentalized the meaning of the holy day season. We dare not forget that Christmas recognizes the invasion of God into our world. The babe of Bethlehem is also the Christ of the Crucifixion and the Lord of the Resurrection. The ubiquity of God—the presence of God in all times and places of our lives—calls us to choose over and over again. Will we proclaim Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord? Or will we ignore God's call, deafened by the dull routine of our ordinary lives?

A baby changes everything—and we dare not be the same people this Advent and Christmastide. What we give to the God who has everything is ourselves. The Christmas carol, *In the Bleak Midwinter*, concludes with the final stanza:

*What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.
If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;
Yet What I can I give him; give my heart.*

The Gift of Gratitude

Another gift we can give to God is our **joy and gratitude**. I spoke two weeks ago about the Scriptural principle: *It is more blessed to give than to receive*. Maturity proves the truth of these words. Oh, even adults enjoy receiving presents at Christmas time; however, the wisest among us receive the most joy from giving.

Parents with children. Spouse with spouse. Neighbor with neighbor.

As God's children, one of the best gifts we can give to our Heavenly Father is joy and gratitude for our many gifts. We are the most blessed among people, but we sometimes forget to simply say, "Thank you."

The Christmas Katie did not get something she wanted. Pouted for several minutes before recognizing the bounty that was hers.

We oftentimes act like petulant, spoiled children with God. Salvation—yes, thanks for THAT, but what I really wanted was Yes, yes, you gave me life, abundant life, and everlasting life, but I also wanted

We must constantly guard against an attitude of ingratitude; instead, joyful Christians are called to cultivate a spirit of gratitude. Two of the most powerful words in the English language are, “Thank you.”

Conclusion

A baby changes everything.

Recall Martin Luther’s words again: “*When God speaks to humanity, God always speaks in baby talk.*” Our heavenly Father does this because God is love. Our Lord never forgets that no matter how big we become—how old, educated, or sophisticated—we are still little, helpless, dependent babies when it comes to our faith.

During these holiest of days, we recall how our Lord entered the world as a baby. To an outside observer, all this talk about angels, an immaculate conception, a virgin birth, a manger, shepherds, an eastern star, and wise men must seem strange. But for those who believe in the name of Jesus Christ, it is the power to save. For unto us is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

We lean over the manger and hear the divine words, “I love you.” And we respond with the words, “I love you, too.” There is no better Christmas present that we can give God than our love . . . our lives.

A baby changes everything.