

Celebrate Christmas Present
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Luke 2:1-20 NIV84

2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to his own town to register.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

What kind of gift giver are you? There are lots of types. These are a few that come to my mind.

The **pragmatist**: I want to give you what you need. Socks & underwear, beautifully gift wrapped.

The **fairy god gifter**: I want to make your dream come true!

The **theme giver**: This year I am giving everyone a sweater.

The **craft**: I am making cookies from Grandma's recipe.

The **collection enabler**: I know you collect racoons, so here is yet another racoon themed mug!

The **elephant hunter**: White elephant gag gifts are my specialty! I know how to embarrass you and make everyone else howl with laughter!

The **noticer** (my favorite): I noticed you have been going on a lot of long walks and noticing the birds, so I got you some field glasses and a guide to bird watching.

Maybe this year you have not been able to give gifts the way you would like to. For passionate gift givers, that can be frustrating. But we can adapt. As a pastor friend of mine said to his neighborhood by way of a sign outside their church: The first Christmas was pretty simple. It's okay if yours is too."

No matter what kind of gift giver you are, that-you-give and how-you-give are ways you show love.

How does God show love?

At this time of year, the obvious answer is: By giving us Jesus. And that is very true. At Christmas we celebrate the gift of the Christ child, given **to a world** that, as the Christmas carol *O Holy Night* puts it, lays long "in sin and error pining." Never in our lifetimes has there been a year when we were pining more for rescue from the consequences of our collective sins and errors. This truly is the year to Rediscover Christmas. That is, this is the year that removed any doubt that we human beings can really make a mess of things, and we are all in this mess together. Christmas is about

Joy to the *whole* world

Salvation proclaimed to the *whole* world

The gift of Christ being the gift to the *whole* world.

Our world is one *whole* place. The whole of creation pines because of our sin and error. As the Apostle Paul says in [Romans 8:22-23](#):

²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies."

Paul saw the glory of resurrection firsthand when he met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. What he wants us to know is that the destiny of the child born in Bethlehem is our

destiny too. All of creation is going through the struggle of transformation. Because we believe in *incarnation* – that is, that God became one of us – then we can trust also trust in redemption – that God is making us one, making us whole, uniting us with God the Three-in-One and with one another.

Yes, God shows us love by giving the gift of the Son. But we come closer still to the essential character of God when we realize that this is how God shows love:

What God loves, God becomes.

Try to take that in. I am trying to think of an analogy for this. Is it like when a Giants fan falls in love with someone from LA and becomes a Dodgers fan? That is a silly comparison to be sure, but it's a start.

Here's what I am remembering. I gave a small Lego set to my friend's son a few years ago. The son was pretty young, and didn't really know me. So after I gave him the set I asked if he'd like help with it. He said yes, so I sat on the floor and we started taking the pieces out of the box, looking at the instructions, and putting the pieces together. His mom sat nearby. At one point he looked over at his mom and whispered, "He's playing with me!" And she smiled and said, "I know!" And I'm remembering how it felt to discover it wasn't the *toy* that mattered, but the *time*. It wasn't my present that felt like a gift. It was my presence.

This is the night we celebrate God's presence. So we sang: *Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel*. Jesus didn't just drop by, or drop off. Jesus *dwelt*. Jesus spent time with us. Jesus didn't stay a baby. Jesus stayed long enough to get into the sweetness and the sweat of human life, to join in the celebration and the searing pain of loss. Jesus fully became fully acquainted with our sufferings, in no small part because he shared in our joys. Jesus *dwelt* among us. Jesus *died* among us. Jesus was *raised* among us. And Spirit of Christ Jesus now *moves* among us. Christ is here, moving us to be good stewards of creation again. Christ is here, compelling us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Christ is here, empowering us to spur one another on to love and good works. Christ is here, inspiring us to not only talk about God's reconciling work, but to roll up our sleeves and do it.

As Eugene Peterson famously put it, at Christmas time we celebrate that *God moved into the neighborhood*. But it's important to remember that *God never moved out!* What God loves, God becomes. When we love God, we become like the God that we love!

This is why there is a *thrill of hope for a weary world*. *Yonder breaks a new and glorious morn*. It breaks not because we are smarter than we used to be, or because we are trying harder than we used to try. It breaks because the gift God gave the world two millenia ago is still the right gift, at the right time, right now.

Amen.