

WE LIKE CHRISTMAS!

## The Giving of Christmas

John 1:1-14; 2 Corinthians 9:15

Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

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AUDIO: [www.fbcjc.buzzsprout.com/7678/228781](http://www.fbcjc.buzzsprout.com/7678/228781)

There's something about Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* that captivates me. I could watch it or read it every week, and I'd never get tired of it. Old Scrooge declares war on Christmas. He rants, "Every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart." Ouch! Ebenezer didn't quite get the spirit of giving, did he? And we feel sorry for him.

Let's face it. Gift-giving is part of the magic of the season, right? Ask any child what she likes about Christmas, and she'll say, "Presents!" Ask any adult what he likes and he'll say, "Watching the kids open gifts." What was the best Christmas gift you ever received as a child? One of my very best was a pair of cowboy boots. When I was about nine, I went through a phase of wanting to be a cowboy (I got over it). What was your best gift?

Did you ever wonder where the tradition of gift-giving at Christmastime began? Like many ancient practices, it has several sources. One, of course, is the gifts which the Magi (wise men) brought to baby Jesus, recorded in Matthew 2. But here's another reason why we give gifts at Christmas. Look again at our text from John's Gospel. Read v. 14. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us...full of grace and truth." That word "grace." Do you know what it means? It means gift, undeserved, not purchased, free. Despite what you've heard, this is how God loves us. Not what we deserve. What we need. In other words "The Word became flesh and lived among us...full of GIFTS and truth."

Now I want to dig a bit deeper into this scripture in John. Do you realize what magnificent gifts God has given us by sending Jesus? First, consider the wonder of it. God, Creator, has come in human form (vv. 1-3). Someone said that the baby lying in the cradle made the wood and the straw! [A.W. Tozer, *Renewed Day by Day*]. Next, notice that Jesus isn't called Jesus or Christ, but the Word. God loves us enough to communicate with us. Think about it. What do you say about someone with whom you've had a falling out? "We're not on speaking terms." God speaks to us in Jesus, the Word. A few years ago, I read the memoirs of a former POW. He said that during his imprisonment, he would gladly do without food rather than do without letters from home. Because we talk with people we love. And communication is the key to relationships.

But here may be the greatest truth about the incarnation (God becoming flesh): God has been where we are. Jesus went through it all. Jesus was born in a barn, homeless. If you're homeless this morning, or in danger of losing your home, Jesus says to you, "I know." Every time you say, "I'm lonely; I'm frightened; I'm being mistreated; I am dying," Jesus says, "I know. Been there. Done that."

Now, what is our reaction to such an incredible gift? The first is jaw-dropping worship and awe. Here's how the Apostle Paul phrased it in our other scripture for this morning: "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15). *The Amplified Bible* says it this way: "His gift, precious beyond telling--indescribable, inexpressible and free."

But of course, there is something else we can do besides just wonder at God's gift. We can imitate God and become givers. Yes, a great deal of giving happens with our regular tithes and offerings and special Christmas projects. I am thankful for your generosity in all of those. Or think about the 400-plus Christmas boxes our team delivered to South Dakota this week. The joy of giving and sharing!

But I'm also talking about little, random, sneaky acts of kindness. And what better time of year than at Christmastime? What about doing something for the UPS driver? The mail carrier? The person at the cleaners? A little kindness and word of appreciation for the wait staff at a restaurant or a clerk at the department store. Or consider this: Sometimes we reserve our best behavior for strangers and are discourteous to people in our home or family. What special gift of kindness, what surprise blessing can you give to someone near you?

But I want to warn you. Giving is transformative. It will change you. At the beginning of the sermon, I mentioned Scrooge's selfish, penny-pinching ways. But something happened. He changed. On the last page of *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens says of Scrooge, "His own heart laughed...and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well." Yes, indeed. Because he learned about giving--not just his stuff, but himself.

When it comes right down to it, there's really only one of two things you can do with a gift. You can either accept it or reject it. How simple. Thus it is with God's gift of Jesus. And there is simply no reason for anyone to leave church this morning without the Jesus gift.