

Along the track

The Best Christmas Gift

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. *Mtt 2:11*

A gift always carries a message, even the smallest gift. 'What do I want to say to this person?' 'What can I give them that will communicate this?' The greatest gift of all is to recognise and acknowledge who that person is, who they are to you, their gifts, their talents. The best gift is one that encourages others to be who they are meant to be, to be as God wants them to be, which is not always as we want. Such a gift comes with no pressures, no unreal expectations, no preconceived ideas about who or what that person 'ought' to be.

The best gift helps those we love to come to know themselves and enjoy the person God created them to be. The best gift calls those we love to adventures that God has in mind for them. So sometimes our gifts not only say: 'I love you', but 'I love your creativity, or your generosity, your persistence, your kindness or...'. That's where finding the perfect gift not only takes time and creativity but sometimes it means swallowing our own need to control and recognize each person for who they are, that they are individually gifted and talented. Sometimes 'I'm sorry' can be the best gift you can give.

Christmas is a time of giving. And receiving. Sometimes it is not always easy to receive – we can be ungracious, if not ungrateful. We can feel embarrassed or perhaps suspicious of the giver's motives. But in reality, gifts tell us something, they convey a message. At various stages in life, for example, when we are young or middle aged or getting on a bit, a kind word, some encouragement or recognition of our gifts and our dreams can make a big difference. A gift, be it just a kind word that says 'I think you can do this,' or 'it's time to try something new,' 'you ought to give it a go,' 'I appreciate what you have been to me' can make an extraordinary difference. Or sometimes our gift might simply say: 'I want you to look after yourself.' They all say 'I love you'.

That sort of gift does not come wrapped up in nice paper. It isn't something we buy but rather something we say, or in how we act or choose to encourage or how we accept the other and their situation.

What is it that we can do, what we can give, especially of ourselves, to make others able to achieve their potential, to make God's dream for them come alive, to enjoy the adventures that God has in mind for them.

So this Christmas, what is it that we can do for those who are poor or sick or lonely or hungry? What is it that we can do for those who seek a new life in our country, a new beginning, who aspire to what you and I enjoy?

God who comes in the stable, on the mountain, in the palaces and in the homes of the poor, on the streets and in our homes,

We give thanks for your love and mercy.

We give You thanks for what we have, for our family, for friendships and the companionship which many do not have.

We give You thanks for peace in our land, for the food and shelter, for the safety so many others yearn for but do not enjoy. These are Your gifts to us.

You have given them to us so that we may bring them to others.

We give thanks for the life of Your Spirit and the goodness *within us* that You, loving God, have placed there. We did not earn it, you have gifted it to us. May we learn to acknowledge that goodness in others.

We pray especially for those who are lonely this Christmas, for those suffer injustice and oppression, for those without food and shelter, for those who suffer depression.

We pray for those who long for their homeland, for those who long for peace, safety and the security that we take so much for granted.

We pray for those who fear others because they are different.

God who comes in the stable, on the mountain, in the palaces and in the homes of the poor, on the streets and in our homes,

We give thanks for your love and mercy.

Amen

Regards
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A Great Christmas Gift!

