

Unwrapping the Gift

Անպատմելի Պարգեւը

1 Corinthians 2:9

Luke 2:12

I am thankful this morning from Sunday school children for the honest messages they wrote to Jesus. They gave gifts to Jesus. I pray that as they grow, those promises they made will be kept in their lives.

It is the season of giving and receiving gifts. I did not grow up relating Christmas with Santa, or receiving gifts on Christmas. Our (Armenians of the Middle East) tradition was different. We exchanged gifts on New Year's Eve, and *Gaghant Baba* (the father of the New Year) came from Mount Ararat. We were always praying for the safety of the Armenian people in Soviet Armenia (those days Armenia was part of the Soviets). We received gifts that night. We waited for that night. The adults used that night ask us children to sing a song, or recite a poem. Oh those days passed... good memories.

It is a joy to give gifts. It is also a joy to receive gifts. Yet, this gift “business” has become such a headache in the commercialized world. Instead of bringing joy, it has become a social necessity and most of us bewildered about what to buy for a generation that is overwhelmed by gifts.

That was not the case a century or two ago. When did Christmas gift giving and receiving start?

I assume the first time it was done by the Wise men. Wise men brought gifts to Jesus. Those gifts were important for the family of Jesus, yet the

also had theological explanations. **Gold** was the proper gift for King Jesus; **Frankincense** is a gift that symbolizes that Jesus is the “High Priest.” The High Priest used it when he went into the Temple to represent the people before God. The most unusual gift that one can offer to a newborn baby was **myrrh**. Myrrh was used to embalm dead bodies. Մեռելները կը զմուտենք: This gift symbolizes that Jesus will die for our sins to give us salvation.

Well, how about gifts we exchange in Christmas time. How did that start?

"**Christmas Gift**" is an expression traced back as early as 1844 in the southern United States. It is derived from the tradition of saying "**Christmas Gift!**" among farming families in rural areas. People would wake on Christmas morning and rush to say "Christmas Gift" before anyone else. The person being told "Christmas Gift!" is expected to give a gift to the person saying it to them. In addition, while "Merry Christmas" is the common and current seasonal salutation, "Christmas Gift" was an equivalent expression used in the rural south and also in southern Pennsylvania, Ohio Valley, West Virginia, and later in northeastern Texas as a simple greeting and recognizing the birth of Christ as a gift.¹

The Sunday School kids brought gifts to Jesus. I want to look at this event from another angle. God gave us a gift, “a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12). **Jesus is our gift. The Messiah is the gift.**

Most of the gifts come wrapped. When people receive a gift, they unwrap it. Otherwise, the gift stays there.

What does it mean to unwrap the gift of Jesus?

Jesus is a very special gift: the more you unwrap it, the more you find more gifts inside. Unwrapping the gift of Jesus is a lifetime experience.

Every morning when I wake up, I will unwrap the gift, knowing that God through Jesus Christ will teach me, lead me, help me to love and care for someone.

But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— (1 Corinthians 2:9 ESV)

1. Receive the Gift of Jesus by opening your heart

This means Jesus will be born not only in a manger, but also in your heart, in your mind, in your soul, in your life.

When I accepted Jesus my life, Christmas started having a different meaning for me. It was not an event outside my life. It was not a date on calendar. The gift of Jesus, the Messiah, the Savior was born for me. He was in my daily life. So I said to him:

“Lord Jesus, I give You my life. I give You my talents. I give You my abilities. I give You my dreams. I give You my future. I give You my weaknesses. I offer myself to You. Here is my gift to You.”

2. The first layer of unwrapping the gift is finding a New Life

John tells us about a Samaritan woman who thought she had everything. Although Jesus was thirsty, he offered a gift to this woman. He offered her Living Water.

“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” (John 4:10)

Oh Pilgrim church, the gift of God is being unwrapped this morning. When you unwrap the gift, you will find new life. You will receive the gift of Living Water.

3. The second layer of unwrapping is FREEDOM from SIN

Paul explains this in the letter to the Romans. We all are fallen and need a Savior to free us from the bondage of sin.

And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, **but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.**

(Romans 5:16,17)

For the wages of sin is death, **but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus** our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

we are justified by **his grace as a gift**, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, (Romans 3:24)

This gift erases our old garbage and gives us freedom from its burdens. Because of him, I was forgiven. WOW, what a comfort and joy. My past record is clear.

Illustration: In the movie the Mission, Robert De Niro, a former slave hunter was carrying on his shoulder a sack of chains and swords that were used to capture slaves. He was carrying that burden on his back all the time on the mission trips. Finally, one of the local Indian villagers who has seen the sins of this man cut the rope of that sack, and all

those instruments fall down. Robert was relieved from past “sins”. The brother who cut the robe meant to say: “This is the meaning of Christ offering us the gift of forgiveness.” (my words)

4. The third layer brings reconciliation between God and man, and man to man

Yes, this baby was wrapped and laid in a manger. Luke repeats this image twice. Perhaps he is reminding us that one day the crucified Jesus will be wrapped by cloths and laid down in a grave.

**The birth of Christ brought God to man
The cross of Christ brought man to God ²**

This ultimate sacrifice brought reconciliation first, with God by removing the enmity, then with ourselves, and then with each other.

and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.
(Colossians 1:20 ESV)

Accepting the gift of reconciliation results in peace in your heart with God, with yourself and each other.

5. The fourth layer: share the Gift!

This gift is no more mine personally. You receive it so that you can share. As you share the gift, it multiplies in you.

A month ago I was talking about callings. I spoke about having spiritual gifts and knowing what are our gifts are essential for the body of Christ.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. (James 1:17)

Any gift that you have is because of the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. (Ephesians 4:7)

Go and share the gift of Christ!

There is no end for unwrapping this gift until we meet with Him face to face.

Thank be to God for this unending gift.

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible, unspeakable, indescribable, too wonderful gift! (2 Corinthians 9:15) *Շնորհակալութի՛ն Աստուծոյ՝ իր անպատմելի պարգևին համար:*

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_Gift
2. Daily Bread, Dec 24, 2011