

THE CHRISTMAS GIFT

Processional: "Angels We Have Heard on High" CW 63

Cong./Children

Invocation

Pastor: As we make time to celebrate today what we believe to be the reason for peace and joy, we do so in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Cong./Children: Amen

Responsive reading between pastor and congregation/children:

Pastor: At Christmas time our minds are filled with many enjoyable things,

Cong./Children: But Jesus, our Christmas Gift, gives us the greatest joy!

Pastor: At Christmas time we join together to sing songs of happiness,

Cong./Children: But Jesus, our Christmas Gift, is our source of happiness!

Pastor: At Christmas time we decorate our homes and offices with bright lights and candles,

Cong./Children: But Jesus, our Christmas Gift, is the true light that lights up our world!

Pastor: At Christmas time we love to visit with friends and family,

Cong./Children: But Jesus, our Christmas Gift, is our best and dearest friend!

Pastor: At Christmas time we set up Christmas trees as a sign of living joy,

Cong./Children: But Jesus, our Christmas Gift, is always alive in our hearts!

Pastor: At Christmas time we give and receive many wonderful gifts,

Cong./Children: But Jesus will always be our greatest Christmas Gift!

Christmas Prayer

Pastor: Dear Lord, how enjoyable it is for us to share this time of celebration as we give praise to you. You bless us at Christmas time with reasons to be filled with joy and happiness, to be with friends, to have hope and peace. All this is possible because you sent to earth the greatest Christmas Gift, your Son, who came into this world as a baby. He came knowing one day he would sacrifice himself out of love for us. Your Christmas Gift is truly indescribable. This morning we offer up our praise and thanks for this Gift, and it is in the name of this Gift, Jesus Christ, we pray.

Cong./Children: Amen

All Children: "The Christmas Gift"

*In the chilled night air of winter, Bethlehem slept long ago.
Never aware of one little prayer that came from the stable below.
God's Gift about to be opened, all through this one lowly birth.
There in the hay a baby boy lay, the ruler of heaven and earth
Ruler of heaven and earth.*

REFRAIN

*Gave us hope, gave us joy, all wrapped up in that one little boy.
Gave us peace, gave us love; God's Gift from heaven above,
Signed by the Father, "With love!"*

*(Gr. 5-8) Angels sang out with loud chorus, chanting the heavenly chords.
Shepherds took flight into the night, hoping to find their dear Lord,
There in the manger before them lay but the infant so small.
Yet, his word still, was peace and good will, for he was the Savior of all,
He was the Savior of all.*

REFRAIN (All)

*(Gr. 1-4) Humble the Gift's new beginning. Crown, gold and gems there were none.
Yet, plainly see, this Gift is for me, God gave me his own precious Son.
Though my few thanks are so meager, yet with my voice I will lend,
Unending praise sung all of my days, for the great Gift He did send.
For the great Gift He did send.*

REFRAIN (All)

PART 1

The PROMISED GIFT...do not open till later

Narrator 1: Gifts. I don't imagine there is anyone here today who does not enjoy giving and receiving gifts. And I also imagine that the idea of Christmas gifts has been on everyone's mind today as well. Gifts play a big part at Christmas time. Where would all the stores be without Christmas gifts? Where would all the wrapping paper printers be without Christmas gifts? Where would all the bow and ribbon manufacturers be without Christmas gifts? What would it be like if there were NO gifts at Christmas?

It's fun to get gifts, and even more fun to give them. We also give at many times other than just Christmas. We give gifts at birthdays, we give gifts at Easter, and we give them at weddings too. We also give gifts for anniversaries, graduations, or other special events. Some people even give gifts for no special celebration at all.

Questioners: Are there gifts in those boxes?

Narrator 1: Yes, in a way we could call them gifts.

Questioners: Are they Christmas gifts?

Narrator 1: Yes, and today we will take a look at them one by one as we learn about the best Christmas Gift that was ever given.

Questioners: But why are there five gifts?

Narrator 1: To understand that, let me first tell you about the Greatest Gift ever given. We find the story about the gift right here in the Bible. **(Holds up Bible.)** From the very beginning to the very end of the Bible we hear the story about God's very special Christmas Gift.

Questioners: What's inside the first box?

Narrator 1: Let's see. **(Walks over to first box – wrapped in red - and removes card tied to ribbon. See BOX INSTRUCTIONS)** The card says, "This box contains the Promised Gift. It cannot be opened until later."

Questioners: But why can't we open it?

Narrator 1: We can't open it because it represents a gift that was coming in the future. People living in the Old Testament waited and waited for the gift, but they never got to see it. It all began when Adam and Eve lived in the beautiful Garden of Eden, but they sinned and went against God's command. Now they would die and be apart from God forever. But God wanted to bring his people back to himself, so he gave them the promise of his Christmas Gift in Genesis 3:15 when he said to them:

Recitation (K): "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Narrator 1: That was just the beginning of God's gift promises. Listen to what he told Abraham:

Recitation (Jr. K): "All the people on the earth will be blessed through you."

Narrator 1: And to Judah:

Recitation (Gr. 1-2): "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs."

Narrator 1: And to Isaiah – (notice how the hints of God's Christmas Gift became more definite).

Recitation (K): "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel."

Narrator 1: Micah also wrote about the Christmas Gift that was to come:

Recitation (Gr. 1-2): "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel."

Narrator 1: Yes, God gave his people many gift promises over thousands of Old Testament years. He was setting the stage. He was getting his gift ready for the exact time and place. He was planning to give his Christmas Gift to the world. That's why the gift couldn't be opened. It had to wait. Can you imagine how anxious the people were to see this gift? Listen to what Paul wrote in Galatians 4:5:

Recitation (K-2): "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."

Congregation: "Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel" v. 1,2

PART 2

The LIVING GIFT...tied with a swaddling ribbon

Questioners: May we see what's in the next box, please?

Narrator 2: (Opens second box – wrapped in white paper. See BOX INSTRUCTIONS) The second box has something white inside. It seems to be made out of cloth. It almost looks like a wide white ribbon.

Questioners: What could it be?

Narrator 2: This box is the Living Gift. It is filled with swaddling cloths. Just after babies were born, they were washed with warm water and rubbed with salt and olive oil. Then the babies were wrapped in long strips of cloth about 4 or 5 inches wide called swaddling cloths. Usually the mothers or another helper laid the child's legs together and held their arms at their side. Then the cloths were wrapped around and around the baby's body. They felt this would keep the baby safe and warm and help it to grow strong and healthy. Mary wrapped the baby Jesus in strips of cloth too.

Questioners: May we hear the Christmas story again?

Recitation (Gr. 7-8): "In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.

"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. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 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.

"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 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. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'"

Children (Gr. 5-8): "*So Silently*"

*Silently, so silently against the veiled sky
God reaches out to claim our race with lowly infant's cry.
The little babe now cradled soft in manger bed so low,
Is God's great gift come to the earth as promised long ago.*

*His tiny hands the world enclose, His eyes reflect bright love.
The Light of all come down to earth, a present from above.
This gift God gives, no one can match; the little baby mild,
For in His birth at Bethlehem, God sends His only Child.*

*Our hearts enfold this Holy Child; our lips chant forth His praise.
No longer still: the night's transformed with angel songs ablaze.
For in this Child our God fulfills, salvation promised long
With joyous chants our spirits raise this wondrous Christmas song.*

Recitation (Gr. 5-6): "Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.'

"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.

"So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told."

Gr. 5-8 and Congregation: "*Peace, Peace*" with "*Silent Night*" v. 1-3 CW 60

PART 3

The THREE GIFTS...fit for a King

Narrator 3: Jesus is certainly the Living Gift. He was a living baby in Bethlehem, and he still is alive today, watching us and loving us every minute of every day.

Children (Jr. K – 2 with hand signs): “Two Hands”
See back page for hand sign directions

*’Twas long time ago on a bed made of straw that a baby was placed by a mother so mild,
Who knew in her heart that this Baby now sleeping was truly God’s only Child.*

REFRAIN

*I’ve two eyes to see God’s glory, two feet that he can use,
I’ve two ears to hear of that wonderful story and two hands to tell the news.*

*While shepherds were watching their sheep late at night they saw heav’n break open with songs all around.
As thousands of angels sang glory to God with a beautiful, heavenly sound.*

REFRAIN

*Those shepherds ran down from their hillside in haste wond’ring what they would find in that place filled with love.
They peeked in, and saw him, ’twas just as it had been announced by the angels above.*

REFRAIN

*I know who that Baby is there in that manger, I know in my heart it is Jesus alone.
Who brought me the gift of my sins all forgiven so I can make heaven my home.*

REFRAIN

Questioners: What’s in the third box?

Narrator 3: (Opens third box – wrapped in gold foil paper and shows gold, incense and myrrh. See BOX INSTRUCTIONS.)

A short time after Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph moved into a shelter or home somewhere in Bethlehem. It was while they were living there that they had a most unusual visit. God decided to announce his gift to the world by putting a very special star in the sky over the house of Mary and Joseph and Jesus. It was this star that led some wise men from the East right to the house where Jesus was. When these wise men, or magi, saw the baby Jesus, they knelt before him just as they would bow before a mighty king, and they gave him three very interesting and precious gifts...gold, incense and myrrh. (Takes each out of the box and says, “Gold, incense, and myrrh.”) We hear about the Magi in Matthew 2

Recitation (Gr. 1-2): “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the East came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him.’

(Gr. 5-6): “After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”

Congregation: “What Child Is This?” v. 1, 3

Narrator 3: What wonderful gifts fit for a King, and how significant for us today that these magi were the first Gentiles to bow before their Savior. And their gifts were very expensive gifts. Gold was a precious metal, and certainly came in handy when Mary, Joseph and Jesus had to move down to Egypt. Incense came from the trunk of a tree. It was a yellow substance that smelled when it was burned. Myrrh was a sticky substance from a thorny bush. It was used as an ointment and for embalming the dead. Isaiah mentioned these gifts when he wrote many years before Jesus was born:

Recitation (Gr. 3-4): “Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.”

Gr. 3-4: “Three Kings”

*Three kings came on camel-back, three kings came riding,
On a journey far from home, in God’s love abiding.*

*Bringing precious gifts with them, they came from afar,
Led across the desert bare by a shining star. (Refrain)*

*Just as they brought peace and light to the baby boy,
Let us bring our hearts to him, filled with love and joy. (Refrain)*

PART 4

The PRICELESS GIFT...wrapped in purple

Narrator 4: But God wasn't quite finished with his gift giving yet. The baby in the cradle brought with him a very special gift for us.

Questioners: Tell us, what's in the fourth gift box.

Narrator 4: (*Opens fourth box – wrapped in purple paper. See BOX INSTRUCTIONS*) Look! This box contains a large purple cloth. It is a robe made of purple cloth. This robe shows us another part of God's Christmas Gift. This robe shows us why it was that Jesus came to live with us.

Questioners: What was wrapped in a purple robe?

Narrator 4: This robe represents the reason that Jesus came to earth. His was a mission of preaching and teaching and leading a perfect life. And his was also a mission of dying on the cross to pay for your sins and my sins. This purple robe reminds us of the pain and suffering Jesus endured just so we could go to heaven one day. Listen to what the Bible tells us about this robe in John 19:

Recitation (Gr. 3-4): "Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'"

"When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to [the people], 'Here is the man!'"

"As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify! Crucify!'"

Narrator 4: And crucify him they did. Jesus suffered on the cross in our place. He died for us that he might take away all the sins we commit. And he did this out of love for us. In fact, that's why God gave us the Christmas Gift...because he loves us so much! John 3:16 speaks of this love:

Recitation (Gr. 3-4): "For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Offering
(Gr. K-8) "*Sing We Nowell!*"

*No-well, no-well, no-well we sing!
Tidings of joyful news we bring!
Christ has come with us to dwell.
Jesus, our Emmanuel.*

*No-well, no-well, no-well we sing!
Tidings of joyful news we bring!
With angelic hosts proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"*

*He is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father.
Jesus, Messiah, the Prince of Peace, come to reign forever. (Refrain)*

PART 5

The CHRISTMAS GIFT...our gift to you

Narrator 5: We have seen God's Christmas Gift. We have witnessed the people waiting many years for the Gift. We have seen the Gift being sent to this earth. We have seen the special gifts of thankfulness that people gave to Jesus, and we have seen that forgiveness of our sins and eternal life is the blessing of God's Christmas Gift, planned since the beginning of time.

Questioners: But there's still one box left. What's in the last box?

Narrator 5: (*Opens last box – wrapped in colorful paper - and takes out a rolled up scroll of paper. See BOX INSTRUCTIONS*) There's only a sheet of paper in this box. It says:

All School: God gave us his Christmas Gift. Now we want to share it with you.

Narrator 5: (*To the congregation*) Please open the card you received this morning.

Children: *"The Christmas Gift"*

*Humble the Gift's new beginning. Crown, gold and gems there were none.
Yet, plainly see, this Gift is for me, God gave me his own precious Son.
Though my few thanks are so meager, yet with my voice I will lend,
Unending praise sung all of my days, for the great Gift He did send.
For the great Gift He did send. (Refrain)*

Recessional by congregation: *"Joy to the World"* CW 62

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