

Gifts Worth Waiting For

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Crossroads Christian Church

Luke 2:22-40 December 28, 2014 1st Sunday after Christmas B

Did you get the gifts that you wanted for Christmas? Was it a joyful day? I hope so. Did you see the people that you wanted to see on Christmas? I hope so. Some of the greatest gifts of Christmas aren't the presents wrapped under a tree, but in the faces of people that you love. Did you get any good surprises that brought you joy? I hope so.

Some of the gifts worth waiting for at Christmas are gifts of words or ideas that help us appreciate the miracles of the Christ's birth. Recently I read poems by two colleagues, fellow pastors. They were both gifts to me. The first poem is by Jim Burford, who is also a Disciples pastor. It goes like this.

Those at the manger were few, I hope you knew.
They came in ones or twos to wipe their hooves and shoes
On the straw-strewn floor, and to wonder at the
Child who lay before them in the manger.

The donkey, weary from many dusty miles,
Looks with fleeting interest at the child;
Then returns to eating, his favorite chore,
The straw and hay from off the floor.

The shepherds, weary too from nights of
Sleepless duty in the fields,
Gaze with awe and new-found thrill at the child
About whose birth they'd been told upon the hill.

The father, Joseph, unsure of much but sure of this.
The infant one who lays before is God's own Son,
And mine the more for I must raise him well with
All that's needed, so he is ready for this call:
To be who he is to be.

The mother, Mary, recovering from birth
Of pain and joy; her first born.

A son whose face of peace and beauty
Brings a tear of love to one who knows him intimately.
Who even now feels within who he is, and is to be.

The lamb, all soft and wiry-haired,
Keeps her watch with eyes that stare
In quiet, desperation-care.
For in the child the lamb can see her own reflection.
The one who lays in manger rood is
When truth be told, the Lamb of God. ⁱ

The second gift of poetry is a prayer/poem by Timothy Haut,
a UCC pastor in Deep River, Connecticut.

TO THE NEWBORN

I bend to kiss
the little one,
the child with the wrinkled hands
and the wisp of dark hair
who looks out at the world
with big, searching eyes.
Now everything is different
in this life which was once just mine.
Now there is a baby
who has filled every corner of my being,
almost to bursting,
a child who needs me
to be strong and good and wise,
this child whom I will hold and keep
from every harm
until he grows into the one
who will take care of me.
Already he gives me the wonders
of moon and stars, a universe of joy,
trusts me with his heart.
I pray this, holding you close:
Child of Bethlehem,
Let me love enough
for you.

Amen.ⁱⁱ

Our scripture passage from Isaiah also describe some special gifts that we associate with the Christmas season. In Isaiah 61:10-62:3 we unwrapped a present containing some brand new clothes—clothes of victory, a robe of righteousness. There's jewelry, too, like a bride and bridegroom might wear in their joy. There was also some garden equipment to help plant and grow righteousness and praise. We received the gift of a new name—God's special name for us. That phrase, of receiving a new name, reminded me of a special time in our family's life. We had received a little girl, 9 months old, as a foster child. We called her by a nickname. After years and years, we finally received permission to adopt her. By this time, she was 8, and so we came up with 3 first-and-middle name combinations, and let her choose. So she became Jennie Kathleen Dixon. It was a beautiful moment for our family. I think that God speaking through Isaiah was offering to the people of Israel, and to us, as well, a new name, a name that would bring blessing. What a gift. A gift worth waiting for.

Then, in Luke 2:22-40, we read a beautiful part of the Christmas story that we often overlook. Mary and Joseph, and the baby, came to the temple to make an offering to God, to celebrate their child's birth. It was an offering of purification of Mary after the blood of childbirth, and an offering of joy for the child that was now theirs. The gift they brought to sacrifice was a poor person's offering, two turtle doves. Wealthier people would have brought a lamb to sacrifice. But for two old, yearning, faithful people, Mary's gift wasn't the turtle doves, but the gift of hope through the Child itself. Simeon and Anna received a gift for which they had been waiting their whole lives long; the assurance that God was truly with them, that God would send a Messiah to save Israel. And in their joy, Simeon, the old, holy man, and Anna, the prophetess, gave the child a gift of their blessings that would guide his way for the rest of his life. I wonder if later, after Jesus was grown up, if he remembered Mary telling him about that blessing? Maybe when he said, "Let the little children come to me," and blessed them, he was remembering the blessing that

he had received when he was a baby. Simeon had waited his whole, long life to see what God would do and to give that blessing; a gift worth waiting for. Simeon's longing had been fulfilled, as he spoke these words: "Now, master, let your servant go in peace according to your word, because my eyes have seen your salvation. You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples. It's a light for revelation to the Gentiles

and a glory for your people Israel." (Luke 2:29-32 CEV)

Think of the gifts that you have received. Think of the gifts of nature; the winter sky, walks in the woods, the murmur of a flowing stream. Gifts worth waiting for.

Think of the gifts of family love; family gatherings at Christmas; gift giving and receiving; family meals; family stories; the joy of children. Gifts worth waiting for.

The prophet Isaiah said that we, God's people, can be the scepter in God's hand. That means that we have the opportunity to share God's glory. We can love and let ourselves be loved. We can cheer people who are down by a word and a smile. We can touch and renew the lives of other people in the name of God.

When we survey the gifts of Christmas, don't we notice that the gifts that mean the most aren't the ones that cost the most? Don't we notice that the gifts worth waiting for aren't material possessions, but the relationships, the family ties, the love we share here at church?

Such gifts don't have to come on December 25, and they don't have to be stacked under a tree. They can come at any time of the year, as we, who are blessed with God's gift of love and salvation through Jesus Christ, give to others that same kind of love. So keep the spirit of the season going, give a gift worth waiting for. Help somebody who is down; send a note to a friend far away; visit someone who is lonely and can't get out; share the good news of Jesus Christ. Amen.

By Michael E. Dixon

ⁱ Copied from DocDisc web forum

ⁱⁱ Timothy Haut, from web mailing, "A Deep River Year."