

## The non- reducible, non-reusable, non-recyclable, gift of Christmas

What does it mean for us that God became one of us? Yes we have been saved and we can share eternal life with God, but there is more to it than that. If we were passive recipients of such a gift it would undermine our free will as gifted by God. The reality is that Jesus is the gate we must pass through to get to a place where eternal life is possible.

The life of Jesus begins in poverty, fear and flight as a refugee. He grew up in a little out of the way town, a community that was not highly regarded by others in the locality. His life didn't change much as he got older, experiencing rejection and isolation for at times we hear that he has to leave some towns in haste to protect himself from those who have been upset by his teachings and actions. Some hero? Yet when God became human in Jesus it shattered our notion of God as a tyrannical deity far removed from his people especially the poor. This baby was many years later to proclaim what had come to be his mission, that he is bringing the good news to the poor, bring liberty to the captives and proclaim a year of the Lords favour. Through his life he spoke of and showed those who were poor how to break out of their oppression and they had the witness of someone challenging unjust structures in the most surprising of areas, their religion. That was over 2000 years ago! How do we know that God is among us today?

Pope Benedict (2007) asked, "If people do not recognise that God was made man, what is the point of celebrating Christmas?" It is a valid question. The answer begins with ourselves. We must fully recognise the birth of Jesus, the why of his birth, his mission, and what its implication is for us and our world. Then we must live out of the answers and person we come to know in our seeking. At Christmas we continue to celebrate the fact that God continues to become incarnate in the lives of those who form his body on earth. If we truly live out of this understanding than we are compelled to live and act as he did., that is, to work for a just world, the inclusion of the outcast, the welcoming of the stranger, reaching out to those in need. Only then will people realise why God became man and truly celebrate Christmas.

The gift of Jesus at Christmas was both a physical gift and a spiritual gift. Behind its giving was an unconditional love. The true meaning of this wonderful season is God's love for humanity. We associate words like love, gifts generosity, family, good food, hospitality with Christmas. Somewhere amid this is the understanding and dream of how our world could be. If we hadn't received our saviour over 2000 years ago our world and God's people would probably be in a worse position. In truth we know it can be better.

God gave us his son to help us to be with him, contrary to the understanding that God wanted to be on earth with us. It is the beginning of a process, a journey for all to the fullness of life. Jesus just didn't come to save individuals but all people. As sharers in Christ we too are tasked to continue his mission. So the celebration of Christmas needs to continually challenge our cosy crib notion of the birth of our Lord. Beyond the tinsel and wrapping paper and the seemingly secular aspects of Christmas we must treasure the true gift of love behind it all which allows for the secular and spiritual side of Christmas to overlap. It can be as simple as the love that went into the buying and wrapping of a gift from someone to the deep and profoundly moving love of God who gave his very self amid the poorest of the poor so that we all can have a place with God in the future. This gift should not be reduced in its significance, reused by someone else when it was given for you, or crushed and reshaped into something else.

The gift of God in Jesus is priceless and will last forever. The truth of this gift becomes more real every time we share the story of it's existence through our active compassion and love for those living on the margins of our communities and societies.

Lets make Christmas real for something this year.