



## God's Silent Gifts

Psalm 126  
Luke 2:13-20

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December 27, 2009  
Third Sunday in Easter

*"The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy." Psalm 126:3*  
*"...Mary treasured these things and pondered them in her heart..." Luke 2:19*

Prayer for Illumination (before Scripture reading)

*Lord, break the bread of your Word among us and nourish us with your truth. In the name of Christ Jesus we pray. Amen*

The angels have gone away, the shepherds have returned to their flocks on the cold hills (no doubt watching the skies!), and the noises, hustle and bustle of all the people gathered in Bethlehem for the census has perhaps subsided just a bit. The child remains in the manger with Mary and Joseph beside him. The sounds are those of a mother and child, a dad who probably doesn't quite know what to do, and perhaps, some nearby cows, donkeys, and such. All else in their little spot in the universe is quiet. This is what Christmas is all about...the quiet birth of a baby, a special baby indeed, in a cave-like stable behind a noisy inn.

We rightly celebrate the great event, our carols echoing the joyous strain, singing "Away in a Manger", among others. We do it gladly. We go to parties and wish all a Merry Christmas. We wear our reds and greens and our Christmas tree necktie. We deck the halls. We bring our gifts of love or duty to family or friend celebrations. How good it all is!

And, when we stop to think, we know that beneath all the celebration and excitement, at the core of Christmas, is God's silent gift.

There are a lot of things that we don't know about what happened that night. After all, there were no reporters to ask the shepherds about their experience, or to inquire of the innkeeper how this year's crowd compared to last year's, nor was there a cameraman available to record the flight of the angels. Yet, what we know of that night is enough.

Art, music, literature, our whole understanding of ourselves and our world, are different because of that event. At the manger we are, to use T.S. Elliot's words, "*at the still point of the turning world.*" The birth of Jesus into the darkness of the world made possible not just a new way of understanding life, but a new way of living life. We are reminded afresh that this is not a cold universe, but that we are children of a God who cares.

Perhaps you've heard a version of the story of the young boy who came in late from playing. The conversation of the mother and son went something like this:

"Where have you been?"  
"Down the street, helping Mike."  
"What were you doing?"  
"His bike broke and I helped him."  
"I didn't know you knew how to fix a bicycle."  
"I don't."  
"Then, how did you help him?"  
"He was crying and I sat down and cried with him."

The longer I live the more convinced I am that God's great gifts to us are silent ones: the gifts of patience, enduring love, forgiveness, of sitting with us in our need and walking with us through the dark valleys.

I am aware of, though I do not understand very well, the philosophical proofs for the existence of God. For those to whom these proofs are important and convincing, I say, good. But for me, it is God's gift of Jesus Christ, the One in whom, Paul tells us, "all things hold together" which assures me that there is a loving God, and that I can, we can, depend on that love. God does not fix everything. Tragedies happen, people die unexpectedly, wildfires, earthquakes and hurricanes wreck their havoc, thieves still break in and steal, but God does sit with us in our sorrow and give us strength in our need.

As I look around and see and hear of the Christmas gifts which we have received I am impressed, indeed moved, not by the gifts which are now unwrapped under the tree—or hanging in the closet, or wherever – but by the many other gifts given. By that I mean, such as notes on a Christmas card, perhaps expressing thanks for an almost forgotten kindness. I received this note some years ago from a woman to whom I and others sang Christmas carols...

...(read)...

There are those who, in these days, sustain others in their grief, who have a knack for helping in time of illness, who care for elderly parents. I think of children and adults who eagerly and lovingly bring food and staples for those less fortunate. God's Silent Gifts.

In conversations with you I learn of the strength received and the inner resolve gained to be a person of integrity, to not shoplift despite great temptation, to not – in other words – be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our spirits. There is the sure and certain awareness, as the Psalmist put it: "**The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.**" (Psalm 126:3)

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I think of the marvelous gift of community in this place, where we have a church to turn to in need. The sense, deep with-in, of how abundantly blessed we are, and thus the commitment to reach out to others.

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We are told that Mary, the mother of Jesus, treasured up all the things that she had seen and heard at the birth of this special child and pondered them in her heart. The moving words of the anthem this morning, printed in the bulletin, lead us to ponder with Mary..

*“Mary Did You Know?...that your baby boy  
...will one day save our sons and daughters?  
...will one day walk on water?  
...has come to make you new?  
This child that you delivered will soon deliver you?!”*

*Mary did you know that your baby boy  
will give sight to a blind man?  
...will calm a storm with his hand?  
...has walked where angels trod?  
When you kiss your little baby, you've kissed the face of God?*

*Mary did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?  
Mary, did you know.....?”*

Perhaps our best gift at Christmas time, 2009, is to ponder what the birth of Jesus Christ means to us in what we have received from God and what we can share with others.

The late Archbishop William Temple wrote:

*“Christ came to us not to shield us from the harshness of the world, but to give us peace – his peace – in our hearts,  
by which we may be calmly steadfast  
while the conflict rages,  
and be able to bring to the torn world  
the healing that is peace.”*

It is the Christmas season. God has come among us.

May God's Silent Gifts in Jesus...

Continue...to touch my life...and yours.

AMEN.