

MONDAY MANNA

23 December 2019

CELEBRATING THE GIVING SEASON'S GREATEST GIFT

By Robert J. Tamasy

This week millions of people around the world will observe one of the most significant holidays of the year: Christmas. Although the practice varies from country to country, and culture to culture, one of the hallmarks of this annual celebration is the giving and exchange of gifts.

For the business and professional world, this giving tradition may include individual gifts to employees and staff, special remembrances for clients, customers and suppliers, festive parties, and in some cases, end-of-year bonuses. In addition, many of us are spending these final days making certain that we have completed our gift purchases for loved ones and friends.

As we enjoy this time of year, revelling in both the receiving and giving of gifts, it would be good to trace the origins of this tradition. Those who regard themselves as Christians or followers of Jesus Christ know this season has additional, profound meaning that transcends the bestowing of material resources to one another. Because as we are told in the Scriptures, Jesus was the foremost, incomparable gift from God to all of humankind. A verse very familiar to many of us says, *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life"* (John 3:16).

The gospel of Matthew tells us the coming Messiah was such an extraordinary, much-anticipated event that magi – wise men from the East – came to visit Jesus after His birth, and carried gifts of gold, incense and myrrh to present to Him. However, the Bible makes it clear that God was the original Gift Giver. Here are just some of the things we learn about this unique, divine Gift:

Bread of Life. In the Scriptures, "bread" is synonymous with the necessities of life, those things that sustain us. Jesus, in the gospel of John, declares, *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.... Here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the bread of life that came down from heaven...."* (John 6:35-51). He is telling us that to truly live, not only in this life but in the life promised to come, we must receive Him.

Good Shepherd. People in biblical times were accustomed to the presence of sheep in their agrarian society, and they knew how dependent those woolly creatures were on the care and concern of their shepherds. Recognising that we, too, require guidance, provision and protection to navigate challenges and complexities of everyday life, Jesus assured His followers, *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.... I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep"* (John 10:11-15).

Light of the World. Increasingly, despite incredible technological advances, we live in a world that seems overwhelmed by darkness and despair. Where can we turn for hope? Jesus said we can turn to Him to escape the darkness and, as we resolved to faithfully follow Him, can bring light to others. *"...I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.... You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden"* (John 8:12, Matthew 5:14). He is saying that as we walk in His light, we can reflect His light to others.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

Describe your favourite part of Christmas and this season of celebration. Is it a time of special meaning for you? Why or why not?

What is the best Christmas gift you have ever given? What is the greatest gift you have ever received? Explain your answer.

When you read, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son," what does that mean to you? Why is Jesus Christ regarded as a gift from God?

Which of the phrases Jesus used to describe Himself seem most meaningful to you? Can you think of any other titles or terms for Him that have also been important to you?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more consider the following passages:

Matthew 5:13

John 10:1-18, 14:6, 15:18, 16:5-15

Romans 6:23

1 Corinthians 1-11