

Dear Partner,

I recently heard someone say that when Mary and Joseph wrapped the baby Jesus in swaddling clothes in the manger, they were wrapping the first ... and best ... Christmas present ever! What a gift is our Lord Jesus Christ to us. As the Son of God, Christ had always existed with the Father. But as the Son of Man, the man Jesus of Nazareth, He had a beginning. Notice how the prophet Isaiah declared the child [who had a beginning] was born, but the son [who was eternal] was given.

Isa 9:6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

God gave His Son, the One who had been with Him for all eternity past, to be born a child from the womb of Mary. In all the bible, perhaps there is no greater verse than this:

Joh 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

How greatly does God love mankind. He loved us even when we were sinners. Without any guarantee that man would repent and love Him in return, God gave us the very best gift that could ever be bestowed upon anybody. And Jesus loved us and the Father so much, He was willing to suffer the most horrible of deaths as our substitute. His love brought him to full obedience, even unto the death of the cross. Again, only genuine, true, heartfelt LOVE can result in such sacrificial giving to save another. The apostle Paul wrote about God's love and the gift of the Son of God this way:

2Co 9:15 Thanks *be* unto God for his unspeakable gift.

The Greek word translated "unspeakable" is *anekdiegetos* and means ... indescribable, what cannot be related, unutterable. This verse is the only time the word is used in all the New Testament. The idea is that no words can convey, or fully express, the greatness of the gift that was bestowed upon man. It is higher than the mind can conceive. Higher than language can express.

In my mind it is much like trying to describe "love" to someone who has never experienced love. Can mere words express the full experience of love? It is more than words. It is more than emotion. It is more than anyone can describe to another who has not experienced love for themselves. But one thing about it ... you sure know love when you experience it. And so it is when any person first experiences Christ by being born

again. You suddenly know true love, the love that passes all understanding. Love that knows no bounds, that never comes to an end, that never gives up. It is absolutely the best thing in all of the universe and amazingly ... it is free ... it is a gift ... the greatest gift of all. The unspeakable gift of Jesus Christ our Savior.

In America we have to be careful at Christmas time that we don't get so caught up in the hustle and bustle, the shopping and the decorating, and the gifts we purchase for each other that we forget the true meaning of the holiday. The reason For Christmas? LOVE! Christmas is the greatest love story of all time. God's love for lost man was too strong for Him to stand on the sidelines and do nothing to help. Man was so lost and undone that there was nothing he could do to save himself. So God did what man could not do. His Son became a man, lived a sinless life, and then offered that perfect life as our sacrifice to make atonement for our sins. Love stepped in and did for us what we could not do. No wonder the bible declares that God IS love. [1 John 4:8]

As we all enjoy the Christmas season and share our abundance through gifts to family and friends, let us not to forget the greatest gifts are not material things. The greatest gifts are those that spring from genuine love. Can you lift somebody up today? Can you speak a kind word to a suffering soul? Can you give shoes to somebody who has none? Can you help lift a burden that somebody else is bearing?

The God kind of love that saved us cannot stand idly by without helping. It steps into messy situations and offers to get its hands dirty to help. This is why God's love is manifested through His grace ... which is His power to help in our time of need:

Heb 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Sue and I love you and appreciate you. We thank God for your generous and giving heart. God bless you!

Your friend and co-laborer,

GARY