

The Perfect Gift for Christmas

Christmas messages carry the Christian essence of the holiday, including wishes about Jesus' birth, the joy of giving, words of faith and hope, sharing the true meaning of Christmas with loved ones, and connecting with others on a spiritual level.

Have you heard the adage? Is your level of joy at Christmas directly related to what you seek? Growing up, I listened to my grandmother say that to my mother one year. My mother was remarking about the financial cost of "making Christmas" for everyone. On this particular day, my grandmother, who didn't usually say too much, asked my mom what she wanted to get out of Christmas. What was it that would make her Christmas wonderful and satisfying? Snow? All the family together, healthy, and happy? A feeling she would define as the "holiday spirit"? Finding the right gift to give? Getting the gift she had been hoping for? My grandmother would then explain that the problem with all these desires was that they could disappoint us.

Have you ever had the kind of experience when you were disappointed by Christmas because it did not deliver what you thought it should? Gram explained that the problem was not the cost of Christmas but perhaps my mother's expectations. Gram asked Mom if she was looking for the wrong gift.

Gram told my mother that God calls us to use all our gifts, talents, and influence to serve others. She said that if we take inventory of our lives and prayerfully consider all the things God has given us to steward our talents, influence, power, and resources, it will provide us with abundant opportunities to give gifts. Gram believed we were meant to serve others with these gifts. And do you know what? Gifting our love was meant to serve others. Gram said she might never be able to buy the gifts someone else can afford, but she will undoubtedly keep using her gifts from God to serve those around her.

If we think about it, the three wise men showed us how to increase our joy at Christmas by looking for the right gift. They came to Jerusalem and said, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His Star in the East and have come to worship Him." They were looking for Jesus, and for them, Christmas was an opportunity to worship Jesus.

So, where do you look for the perfect gift? We learn from the three wise men that there are right and wrong places to look for Christmas. They started by looking in the wrong place. They looked where their human reasoning said they should look. The star indicated the birth of a new king in Israel. The three wise men went where kings should be born - to the palace of Herod the Great in the capital city of Jerusalem. But what a mistake that was! When Herod heard of the birth of a new king, jealousy sought to destroy him.

We, too, are tempted to look for joy at Christmas in the wrong places. We think we will be satisfied by receiving or giving the right gift. We imagine that being with family will be joyful. These actions can easily disappoint us because we might not be able to afford the right gift for a loved one. Moreover, family members might be missing from our holiday celebration. If we look to these things for joy, we may be left with a feeling of disillusionment.

The three wise men looked in the right place when they looked to God. The trip to Jerusalem was not a total loss. With new information, they looked again at the star and followed it to Bethlehem until it stood directly over the house where the child Jesus lived.

The three wise men came to Jesus' house bearing gifts. The gifts they gave were entirely appropriate.

1. *They gave gold*, a gift for a king, acknowledging that Jesus was the King.
2. *They gave frankincense*, a gift for a priest. This was incense the priests used in Temple. By giving it they acknowledged that Jesus was a priest - the One who would bring us to God.
3. *They gave myrrh*, a gift for the dead. This fragrant ointment was used to anoint a body before burial. By giving it, they acknowledged that Jesus had come to die for the sins of the world.

Is it up to us to give appropriate gifts this Christmas? Don't get me wrong, I'm not talking about material gifts. I am talking about more essential gifts like our love and kindness to our friends and family, our help to those who are hurting, and the gift of forgiveness to those who have hurt us. Giving these kinds of gifts could result in a joyous and meaningful Christmas.

What are you giving to others for Christmas this year? Consider giving your time to your family, friends, and community. Give your compassion to the hurting. Give your forgiveness to the isolated. And give your heart to Jesus. If I have learned anything about Christmas, I found when I looked in the right places and gave a meaningful gift, I experienced a joyous Christmas. I hope you do, as well.

Prayer:

Thank you for this season of celebrating Jesus's coming into the world to save us and give us joy. Help us remain grateful to you for giving the ultimate gift of Jesus. Amen.