

A well-wrapped gift

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Imagine the love of parent or grandparent carefully wrapping a present for a beloved child. The gift is costly, and the wrapping exquisite — colorful paper folded into neat edges and topped with crisp bow. The end result is so lovely that despite the child's eagerness to get at the toy inside, she slowly and reverently opens it one taped seam at a time, guessing as she goes about what might be inside it. What excitement! What joy!

Now think, too, for a moment about the many lovingly wrapped gifts that our heavenly Father has lavished upon us.

Some of these gifts, of course, take a lifetime to unwrap. Take for example the gift of children! Certainly the "wrapping" of a newborn is irresistible: those plump cheeks and toothless grins are undeniably sweet. Yet you only begin to discover what children will become by observing them as babies. You receive these precious gifts gradually at each stage of your relationship with them, as their characters grow and unfold and you learn how better to appreciate and cherish them.

So it is, too, with the person that you marry. You discover each other and your love for each other over the space of your whole life together in marriage. A good marriage is a gift that keeps on giving, as you receive more and more benefits from your lifelong companionship. The gift of a good marriage and the gifts *from* a good marriage are received over decades as you live, speak and interact with each other. But you need to keep on looking and listening to receive more and more from each other as you disclose yourselves to each other.

In John 1:14, 16, we hear about God's great Christmas present for all people on earth. St. John says: *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ... For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.*

This gift that God the Father presents to us at Christmas is a strange package. You could even say that the wrapping itself *is* the gift. He sends His One and Only Son to be born as a little baby in an ordinary human family, to live a

human life with all its highs and lows, to interact with us in a human way and to die, just like every other person. God's eternal Son, the Creator and Ruler of heaven and earth, reaches out to us with human hands, speaks to us with a human tongue, hears us with human ears and sees us with human eyes. He takes on a human body and joins us in our bodily lives here on earth in order to join our bodies with His body and bring us bodily to his heavenly Father, where we will live bodily with Him forever.

God's Son reveals His Father as He dwells with among us here on earth. His miracles, His teaching, pull back the corners of God's great plan of salvation. In His transfiguration, His disciples catch a fleeting glimpse of glory. But only in His death and resurrection, His ascension to the Father and the sending of His Holy Spirit is the wrapping fully torn away and the goodness of the Gift fully revealed.

This hiddenness and revelation — wrapping and unwrapping — marks God's relationship with His people through the ages. In the Old Testament, God dwelt with his people in first in a portable tabernacle and then in a temple, His house in Jerusalem. Yet He wrapped His glory, His radiance, in a cloud to meet with His people there in that place and give them safe access to Himself and His blessings. He showed Himself to them only in a limited, hidden way.

And now God's Son continues to dwell with us on earth, here and now. He tabernacles with us bodily and makes the church His new temple, the community where he resides. He makes His home with us, showing himself to us by His Spirit and, through us, to others. He speaks His Words into our ears whenever we gather together for worship, gives Himself to us bodily in the Lord's Supper. He dwells bodily with His disciples on earth, so that we can dwell bodily with Him in heaven.

As God's Son presents Himself to us week by week and year by year, we receive grace upon grace from His Hands. Jesus — so full of grace and truth that we can never exhaust His fullness — keeps giving of Himself to us, endlessly and abundantly as we follow Him in our life on earth. We receive and keep on receiving earthly and heavenly blessings from Him, like light from an unquenchable sun and water from a spring that does not run dry.

At Bethlehem, Mary wrapped her Son in swaddling clothes. At Calvary, He was *unwrapped* — stripped by Roman soldiers and nailed naked to a cross. Yet by

this unwrapping, He has wrapped you in His own robe of righteousness, and He presents you — a well-wrapped gift — to His Father. Now when you, with the eyes of faith, see Jesus as God’s Son, you see God the Father looking with love on you and smiling at you. So in the *Large Catechism* Luther says: “we could never come to recognize the Father’s favor and grace, were it not for the Lord Jesus, who is the mirror of the Father’s heart.”

**Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail the incarnate Deity,
Pleased in human flesh to dwell
Jesus, our Immanuel.**

“Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!” (2 Cor. 9:15).