



The Wonderful Gifts of Christmas

Message for 11 pm Holy Communion Christmas Service on Friday, 24th December 2021

God's Nutritious Christmas Gift

I'm sure I'm not the only one who has given a sweet treat to someone for Christmas.

In fact, one of the most popular Christmas gifts is a Christmas pudding or a large slice of Christmas cake.

The edible gift, whether it be chocolate truffles, gingerbread biscuits, Panettone, or a yule log – is a sign that someone has lovingly taken the time to purchase all the ingredients, meticulously followed the recipe, and painstakingly laboured over a hot oven, to produce the delicious masterpiece – all of which you get to enjoy!

Certainly, edible gifts are worthy of being regarded as a 'great' gift.

At our Carol service earlier this evening we talked about how at Christmas, God gave humanity the greatest of gifts.

His gift had two essential qualities:

- It is a gift the person cannot possibly afford, nor do they actually deserve; and
- it is a gift the person desperately can't live without.

We learnt that God's greatest gift was given at Christmas, at the birth of His Son Jesus Christ.

But, the gift of his Son was a unique and peculiar kind of gift.

For Jesus is not a gift who is to be hung on the wall, or placed in the middle of the table, to be admired as decoration.

Jesus told us, that to receive him as God's gift, was to *partake* of him.

It may sound a bit crude, but Jesus spoke of himself as an edible gift. Really?

Yes! He said,

55... my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 57 I live because of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, anyone who feeds on me will live because of me." (John 6:55-67)

It was as difficult to understand when Jesus first spoke of it, as it is today.

We find it very difficult to understand such imagery – it sounds down right offensive – and too alike cannibalism.

For us to understand the essence of what Jesus was referring to we need to remember that the dominant symbolism for God's awaited King, throughout the Old Testament, was of a lamb.

As early as Abraham, God provides the lamb which will be sacrificed, ...

Then, when the Israelites were preparing to be freed from slavery to the Egyptians, God introduced the Passover lamb – a pure lamb, without any of deformity, was to be slaughtered and eaten. Its blood would form a covering from the judgement that was to come.

This same pictorial practice was repeated year after year, as a reminder for God's people of their need for a covering to be made for their sins.

Later, both the Prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah spoke of one who was to come would be "led like a lamb to the slaughter" (Jeremiah 11:19; Isaiah 53:7)

Even at his birth, this powerful symbolism shines.

As I prepared this message, I read that for centuries Passover lambs were raised in Bethlehem. In those shepherds' fields outside Bethlehem, a very special breed of sacrificial lamb was raised and nurtured to be brought to Jerusalem at Passover to be slaughtered to cover the people's sins.

So, how fitting that Mary's Lamb, God's perfect Lamb, the Lord Jesus, would be born there!

And He was born in a stable. How fitting that a sacrificial Lamb would be born in a stable!

That is why John the Baptist cried out that Jesus was "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29)

Finally, in the book of Revelation, Jesus is referred to as the Lamb of God twenty seven times.

The Holy Communion feast of which we are about to partake, is symbolic of the Great Supper of the Lamb or Wedding Feast of which the whole church attends and participates in. We celebrate and 'feast' on God's pure Lamb now, as a picture of what will take place in the future.

John, in fact, was given an opportunity to see this future heavenly banquet taking place in heaven. He saw a vast crowd, in continual praise to God. One of the angels standing in the sun shouted,

*"Praise the Lord! For the Lord our God, the Almighty reigns.
Let us be glad and rejoice and let us give honour to him.
For the time has come for the wedding feast of the lamb,
and his bride has prepared herself.*

*She has been given the finest of pure white linen to wear.”
For the fine linen represents the good deeds of God’s holy people. (v6b-8)*

Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, is without a doubt the greatest of God’s gifts.

And God has so designed His gifts that every one of them is essential, and every one of them we simply can’t live without.

We truly we can’t live without partaking of this essential, spiritual nourishment.

Just as we can’t live very long with our physical nourishment, we can’t live at all in a spiritual sense without the nourishment that Jesus Christ provides.

We depend upon Jesus for our survival. We return to his table week after week, as a reminder of our dependence on Him and the sustenance that only Jesus can provide.

My favourite song, the one I’m singing internally as we meet tonight. It is called ‘O Holy Night’. There is a verse which we didn’t include in our 7 pm service. Its words speak beautifully for us as we gather around Christ’s table.

*Led by the light of Faith serenely beaming
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming
Here come the wise men from Orient land
The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger
In all our trials born to be our friend.
He knows our need, our weakness is no stranger,
Behold your King! Before him lowly bend!
Behold your King! Before him lowly bend!*

And because I can’t help it, it continues to verse 3

*Truly He taught us to love one another,
His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains he shall break, for the slave is our brother.
And in his name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
With all our hearts we praise His holy name.
Christ is the Lord! Then ever, ever praise we,
His power and glory ever more proclaim!
His power and glory ever more proclaim!*