

Good Evening,

How many of you went shopping for a Christmas gift today? How many of you are planning on shopping for a Christmas gift tomorrow? Well, I'm not sure about tomorrow but I already bought a Christmas present today and when I brought it home and put it on the counter, my son said "What is that?" I told him that those are pickled polish sausage for our Christmas Eve dinner. So why on earth would I buy pickled polish sausage for our Christmas Eve dinner, well, the same reason I bought uncured Italian dry salami. You see, I bought these items because for our Christmas Eve the tradition of having a family dinner is really not about having a family dinner. You see about 42 years ago Jan's mom would prepare this wonderful turkey supper with all the trimmings for us and while the turkey was baking we would eat some hor' dourves and snacks. Then each year it became more and more a challenge to see who could bring the best or strangest hor dourves or snacks. Then you can imagine that after eating all the tasty and delicious hor dourves and snacks that we were no longer hungry for the turkey dinner? So now Christmas Eve dinner is made up entirely of hor dourves and snacks, there is no turkey dinner. And that is why for my gifts to the dinner I bought pickled polish sausages and that strange salami.

Is it me or have some of you also noticed that with black Friday, cyber Monday, stores now open 24 seven and anytime online shopping that it seems that our Christmas season has become pretty much centered on buying things and the giving of presents? So is gift giving at Christmas really all that bad? At first some might think so but if we look a little deeper into the tradition of giving gifts at Christmas we just may find the tradition is really based on a very important part of the Christmas Story and the Birth of the Baby Jesus. You see the giving of gifts has been a tradition ever since the very first Christmas when the Wise Men who followed that bright star in the sky presented gift of gold, frankincense and myrrh. As we take a moment and think about those gifts that the Wise Men gave, has it occurred to anyone that those are some really strange gifts to give to the baby Jesus. We could make better sense of these gifts as we can think of the symbolism they each represent; gold is a gift fit for a king and Jesus was the King of the Jews;

Frankincense was used by the priests and Jesus was now our priest; and then there was the Myrrh and it was used for anointing bodies for burial and it was Myrrh that was used to anoint Jesus' body. So we can now see the symbolic meaning of these gifts was really about Jesus' life and death. However if we look beyond the symbolism, could it be possible that the Three King's gifts had a greater purpose?

For us to begin to understand this greater purpose, we first need to remember that King Herod was afraid of the birth of the baby Jesus and had sent his soldiers to kill all the baby boys in Bethlehem. Second, we need to remember that God warned Joseph of this plot to kill all the baby boys and that he and his family should flee to Egypt and escape from the soldiers. Joseph did what God had told him to do and gathered up his family and with their possessions fled to Egypt. So here is a question for us to think about? How could a poor carpenter move his family to another country, live in that country, and provide for them? One explanation is that God inspired the Three Wise Men to give gold, frankincense, and myrrh. You see these gifts were compact and small in size and they were also very expensive and could easily be sold. And when these gifts were sold there would be enough money for Joseph to provide for his family until it was safe for them to return home. So let's go back to our earlier question, "So is gift giving at Christmas really all that bad?" Well it appears from our new understanding of the Three Wise Men's gifts that we can look at our gift giving with joy and a feeling that we too, are inspired by God; to select just the right gift for those we care about and love. As our message continues we are going to look at several stories about giving gifts at Christmas and the impact that these gifts had on those who received them. As you hear these stories think back and remember the joy you received when you opened your Christmas gifts and you knew they were from someone who loved you. Also remember and think about the joy and the feelings you received when you gave a Christmas gift to someone special in your life.

Christmas Gift Story about the Centre Theatre

Christmas Gift Story about the Butternut Christmas Club

## The Story of the Christmas Orange,

Sometimes it is easy to forget the true meaning of Christmas. The busy traditions of the season and the appealing advertisements for material goods can leave the pure and simple truths far, far behind. Jake was nine years old with tousled brown hair with blue eyes as bright as a heavenly angel. For as long as Jake could remember he had lived within the walls of a poor orphanage. He was just one of ten children supported by what meager contributions the orphan home could obtain in a continuous struggle seeking donations from townsfolk.

There was very little to eat, but at Christmas time there always seemed to be a little more than usual to eat, the orphanage seemed a little warmer, and it was time for a little holiday enjoyment. But more than this, there was the Christmas orange! Christmas was the only time of year that such a rare treat was provided and it was treasured by each child like no other food admiring it, feeling it, prizing it and slowly enjoying each juicy section. Truly, it was the light of each orphan's Christmas and their best gift of the season. How joyful would be the moment when Jake received his orange! Unknown to him, Jake had somehow managed to track a small amount of mud on his shoes through the front door of the orphanage, muddying the new carpet. He hadn't even noticed. Now it was too late and there was nothing he could do to avoid punishment. The punishment was swift and unrelenting. Jake would not be allowed his Christmas orange! It was the only gift he would receive from the harsh world he lived in, yet after a year of waiting for his Christmas orange, it was to be denied him. Tearfully, Jake pleaded that he be forgiven and promised never to track mud into the orphanage again, but to no avail. He felt hopeless and totally rejected. Jake cried into his pillow all that night and spent Christmas Day feeling empty and alone. He felt that the other children didn't want to be with a boy who had been punished with such a cruel punishment. Perhaps they feared he would ruin their only day of happiness. Maybe, he reasoned, the gulf between him and his friends existed because they feared he would ask for a little of their oranges. Jake spent the day upstairs, alone, in the unheated dormitory. Huddled under his only blanket,

he read about a family marooned on an island. Jake wouldn't mind spending the rest of his life on an isolated island, if he could only have a real family that cared about him.

Bedtime came, and worst of all, Jake couldn't sleep. How could he say his prayers? How could there be a God in Heaven that would allow a little soul such as his, to suffer so much all by himself? Silently, he sobbed for the future of mankind that God might end the suffering in the world, both for himself and all others like him. As he climbed back into bed from the cold, hard floor, a soft hand touched Jake's shoulder, startling him momentarily and an object was silently placed in his hands.

The giver disappeared into the darkness, leaving Jake with what, he did not immediately know! Looking closely at it in the dim light, he saw that it looked like an orange! Not a regular orange, smooth and shiny, but a special orange, very special. Inside a patched together peel were the segments of nine other oranges, making one whole orange for Jake! The nine other children in the orphanage had each donated one segment of their own precious oranges to make a whole orange as a gift for Jake. Sharing what we truly value is the true spirit of Christmas. Our Heavenly Father gave us His beloved Son. May we, like the children in the orphanage, find ways to share His love with others less blessed.

Our message today has looked at Christmas gift giving from two views, one view is about our feelings when we receive a gift and the second view is about our feelings when we give a gift. But I would like to close our message today with a third and fourth view and the third view is about our feelings when we receive a gift from God. You see, Jesus is God's Christmas gift to us and it is the greatest gift that God could give us. And our fourth view is the feeling that God receives when we give Him the greatest Christmas gift He could receive, our hearts, our love, and our lives of service to Him.

Let us pray, Most Loving Father, thank you for this night and for all it represents. Thank you for the hope you bestow, the peace you bring, the love you pour out, and the joy you give. We praise you most of all for Jesus, your Word made flesh. May he light our way as the holy star lit the way for the wise men. Amen.

## ***Lighting of the Christ Candle***

### **First Reader**

Rejoice, people of God! The light has come into the world.

*(Lighting of the Four Purple Advent Candles)*

O God, now we light the candle of your nativity!

*(Lighting of the Center, White Christ Candle)*

With the company of heaven and with sounds of great joy, you come to us.

### **Second Reader**

The prophet Isaiah proclaimed a time when those who walked in the shadows would see a great light. A light would shine and a child would be born to us.

### **Third Reader**

The evangelist Luke painted the nativity sky and repeated the heavenly song of the angels, "Glory, peace on earth and goodwill!"

### **Fourth Reader**

John declared that this great light is Christ, the Word made flesh. This great light lives among us. By it we behold God's glory—full of grace and truth. At Christ's nativity, we now rejoice.

***People***

***God, our Life and Light, thank you for coming this night to us. Thanks for touching all heaven and earth with your splendor. In every corner of the world, shine this night with your peace. In every corner of our hearts, shine this night with your grace. Amen.***