
"Your Word is a Light Unto My Path" - Psalm 119:105

Have you Forgotten to put Someone on your List?

By George Gunnink

No doubt you have heard the controversy over the Royal Canadian Mint's advertisements this year, in which the words to "The Twelve Days of Christmas" have been changed to "The Twelve Days of Giving." Interestingly, there seems to be quite a bit of negative reaction to this change in wording. Many Canadians still seem to believe that there is something sacred about Christmas Day, and the word Christmas generally. It seems that many Canadians recognize that there is a religious side of Christmas that they do not want to give up. They don't want to take Christ out of the season. Assuming this is so, is there not an obligation on all Canadians to consider what Christmas really is about? Why do you care what the season is called?

There seems to be general agreement that, regardless of what the season is called, it is a season that involves giving. By the time you receive this issue of *The Path*, you probably are quite tired of Christmas shopping and giving. You have joined the

crowds at the mall dutifully buying gifts for your family, friends and other deserving people in your lives. This brings us to the question posed in the title of this article: Have you forgotten to put someone on your list? To whom do we give?

Why do you care what the season is called?

The whole issue of what we call the Christmas season presents a good opportunity to reflect on the tradition of gift-giving at Christmas. Being no historian, I don't know when this tradition began. However, because the holiday is a celebration of the birth of a very significant figure in history, it might be appropriate to reflect on the gift-giving done at the time of this person's birth. After all, the holiday was named in His honour.

The tradition of gift-giving could very well be traced to the Bible story of some wise men who brought their gifts to the young child Jesus. The Bible book Matthew tells the story of these

wise men, and is very instructive for our gift-giving today. These wise men (some suggest there were three of them, but it is unclear how many there actually were) were from a country far away from the country of Israel. They noticed a star in the night sky and realized that this was no ordinary star. This was a star of great significance. There was none other like it in the sky. They felt compelled to follow it and were eventually led to Israel to the house where Jesus was being raised as a young child. When they came to the house, they saw Jesus with his mother Mary and "bowed down and worshipped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him gifts of gold and of incense and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11).

There are a number of instructive things in this story. First, these were not ordinary men. The wise men were likely men of power and wealth, men with great standing and recognition in the world at the time. After following the star from their home country to the country of Israel, they received

an audience with King Herod. They did not find the royal child that they expected to find there, so they left the royal palaces of King Herod and continued following the star, until it led them to the baby Jesus. Once there, these men of great pomp and influence fell to the ground and worshipped the baby. He was obviously a special child. What a sight that must have been to those who did not appreciate His significance. For those who did not understand who the child was, the adoration of the wise men must have seemed like complete foolishness.

Second, the wise men did not bring ordinary gifts. They opened their *treasures* when they saw the child Jesus. They did not bring cheap, sub-standard gifts and trinkets. They brought gifts that were reserved for royalty, to bring honour to the person to whom the gifts were given, and to show their great respect for Him. The wise men brought the best they had and laid it before this child Jesus. Again, what foolishness this must have seemed to those who did not know who the child was. Expensive gifts were being laid before a child in a home in the small town of Bethlehem. It all seemed so out of place. Should not royal gifts be reserved for royal children born in the royal circumstance and setting of a royal palace?

These details point to one conclusion: this was no ordinary child. He was indeed royalty. The focus of the story of the wise

men was the recipient of their gifts. What child has His own star to direct others to him? What child is worthy of receiving the adoration and worship of influential men who had travelled long distances to see Him? What child is worthy to receive the most precious of gifts? What was it about this child that was so special? Why the focus on the child? Quite simply, because he was God Himself! This was not a sentimental gift-giving to a little baby in Bethlehem, just because He was so cute. This was the giving of gifts to the King.

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What can we learn from this gift-giving? Most importantly, that our focus during the Christmas season should be on the child to whom the wise men presented their gifts. While we cannot fault the exchange of gifts at Christmas between family and friends, our Christmas gift-giving should centre on Christ. We must follow the star of the Bible, which leads us to Him and tells us how he wants to be worshipped: with the most precious of gifts, our treasures. What is our most precious gift to him? Is it not our whole being, our entire lives? The wise men bowed down and worshipped; so also we are directed to worship Him, giving our lives to Him. It is not enough to name a holiday season after Him, and to attend your local church once during the season as a token to Him. He deserves

much more worship than that. He is, after all, royalty.

Ironically, when we worship by giving our entire lives to Him, He also promises that we will receive the greatest gift of all: Christ Himself. What kind of gift is He? He makes very clear throughout the Bible that He is the gift of peace. He brings peace to our lives, regardless of our circumstances, regardless how hopeless our lives may seem, regardless of the bad shape of the world in which we live. Not only do we receive peace in this life, we may also look forward to a life that never ends. He promises that we will never die. Even though we may leave this earth, we will live eternally in the life that awaits us. Christ truly is the "gift that keeps on giving."

So, when you're giving and opening your gifts this season, do not forget the greatest gift of all: Jesus Christ, who gave Himself so that we may receive peace. When we take this approach, it is easy to understand why the season is named after Him. He gave us Himself as a gift so that we may receive the gift of peace in our lives and in the life that awaits us after this life. Why would anyone want to miss out on a Gift that keeps on giving both in this life, and for eternity? May this inspire you to bring your gift of worship to the Lord throughout the year. I urge you to join us in following the star of the gospel to Jesus Christ, and in humbling ourselves before Christ, who came to this world to give us the greatest gift

of all: Himself. This is one gift you don't want to miss out on. It's time to put Him on your list!

Paradox: Man's History Turned Around (Twice)

By Colin VanDelft

A paradox is something that seems contradictory but is actually quite true. In many ways God's dealings with man involve a strong element of paradox. God created man perfect and without sin. Man chose to give in to temptation and listen to Satan and turn his back on God in disobedience. This meant that the course of human history was changed. God intended man to live forever in balance with God and His creation. Man's sin brought death into the world. This action has had permanent effects. Adam, the first man, passed down this spirit of rebellion to all the generations that followed. It would appear that the new course of the history of man and the world is set in stone. If we look around us we see some evidence of this. Man is mismanaging the world so that there are many environmental disasters and ecological nightmares. There are wars and bloodshed in every corner of our world. The moral fabric of our society is unravelling at an alarming rate. It appears that it is only a matter of time before the earth as we know it will exist no more.

Last one out, turn off the light.

There is a glimmer of hope, however. With the Christmas season upon us we are reminded that this glimmer of hope shines very brightly. It shines brightly enough to make a difference in everyone's life. By God's grace and through his awesome power the course of human history will change again. When God punished Adam and Eve for their fall into sin He also spoke of sending a Saviour to bring man back to God again. Man cannot do this. While man made the move away from God it is God who pulls man back to himself.

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Here is where the element of paradox comes in. Read on and you'll see what I mean. What the church teaches about the Lord's Supper continues in the vein of paradox. "From the beginning of his incarnation to the end of His life on earth he bore for us the wrath of God, under which we should have perished eternally. By his perfect obedience he has fulfilled for us all the righteousness of God's law. He did so especially when the weight of our sins and the wrath of God pressed out of him the bloody sweat in the garden of Gethsemane. There he was bound that we might be free from our sins. He suffered countless insults that we might never be put to shame. He was innocently condemned to death that we might be acquitted at the

judgement seat of God. He even let His blessed body be nailed to the cross that He might cancel the bond which stood against us because of our sins. By all this He has taken our curse upon Himself that He might fill us with His blessing. On the cross He humbled Himself, in body and soul, to the very deepest shame and anguish of hell. Then he called out in a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" that we might be accepted by God and never more be forsaken by Him."

Paradox continues to be present in Christian's lives today.

That section is full of the paradoxical way in which God is working. Many of those sentences include word pairs which are opposites of each other (bound/ free, insults/ no shame, condemned/ acquitted, nailed/ cancelled bond, curse/ blessing, forsaken/ accepted).

God sacrificed His one and only begotten Son so that he could adopt many children into his family. A perfectly true and righteous man (one who is at the same time true God) is needed to pay for our sins of a human race incapable of doing good. God sent his Son, the exalted King of kings, to be born in a stable and laid in a manger to a humble couple. God's Son, the all-powerful ruler of the universe, dwelled in the body of a man and was subject to weariness and emotion and pain. God's Son, the Judge of all the earth, subjected Himself to human justice which

condemned Him to death without due cause.

Paradox continues to be present in Christian's lives today. We are responsible for our decisions, yet God has long ago chosen us in Christ. We are perfect in the eyes of the Father but experientially imperfect. We work out our own salvation, yet it is God who works His will within us. We are free in Christ, yet slaves of Christ. Even Christ Himself, 100 percent God and 100 percent man is something of a paradox.

It is important to note that this element of paradox is not meant to bring confusion or frustration. It is certainly true that God's ways are not man's ways. God operates in ways that are higher than man's thinking

can comprehend. For me there is a certain element of comfort in the fact that I cannot explain or predict God's actions. It shows me that He is bigger than I and much more able and qualified to be in control of everything from the rotation and revolutions of the planets to the atoms and molecules that make up all matter. If I could explain God I could put him in a neat little box and He would be equal, if not subject, to me.

At this time of the year, when we remember our Saviour's birth it is important to keep the big picture in mind. Our society has had a tendency to detach Christmas from the other parts of the redemptive story (death, resurrection, and ascension) and

raise it up. As a result its' meaning has been lost and replaced with some vague warm and fuzzy Winterfest. When kept in perspective it is part of a wonderful chain of events which reconciles man to God and paves the way for a new Paradise in which man will once again dwell with God and there will be no presence of evil or effect of sin. The way of life which God started with Adam will be restored and man will once again be able to bring praise and glory to God his Heavenly Father with all his being.



Join Us!

Christmas Praise Evening

Sunday, December 22 at 7:30 p.m.

Christmas Day Service

December 25 at 10 a.m.

In the Aldergrove United Church Building

The Canadian Reformed Church at Aldergrove always welcomes visitors!

Join us for worship on Sundays
8:45 a.m. & 2 p.m.

in the Aldergrove United Church Building
2623 - 272 Street, Aldergrove, B.C.

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Do you have any questions about the gospel, or comments about something that you read here in The Path?

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