

Day 24

By Tim Frickenschmidt

There is a sense in which all the best stories are about gifts. We give them to each other, and we receive them. The young mother cradles her newborn, and in that moment, her heart knows what it means to give herself completely, as she offers her love, her hopes, her very being. This is what we celebrate at Christmas—the birth of Jesus, a gift like no other. And, as any good gift does, it takes us by surprise, sets us on edge, makes us ask: What does it mean to receive a gift this great?

In the mystery of the Incarnation, God gives Himself to us. As T.F. Torrance writes, “‘God with us’ means that in the birth of Jesus Christ, God has given Himself wholly to us, in a love that is absolutely unstinting and infinitely lavish...” It’s hard to take in, isn’t it? God’s gift to us isn’t a thing that we can hold in our hands and set down again. It is Himself. The Creator of the universe, the one who was and is and will be, chooses to be with us, chooses to live among us, chooses to make His home in the mess and the muddle of our lives.

In this birth, God does not simply offer us a way out of the mess; He invites us into something much deeper. We are not just saved from our sins or rescued from death—we are given life itself, life so full it can only be described as eternal. The very presence of God and eternal union with Him is the greatest gift we’ve been given. What does this mean for us?

It means at least that we, who have received everything, are invited to give. If God has given Himself to us, then how could we do anything less than give ourselves—our time, our love, our resources—back to Him and to the world around us? And so, for us as Christians, Christmas becomes not just a time of receiving, but of reflection: How does our giving manifest the generosity of God’s love? How does our offering show that we have been touched by the unspeakable, unfathomable grace that God has poured into the world in the birth of His Son?

Torrance continues: “The sheer extent, the boundless range, of His act of love takes our breath away. ‘God with us’ means that God Almighty insists on sharing His life with us.” It’s as if, in the giving of His Son, God is saying: *I will not let you go. I will share my life with you, and you, in turn, are invited to share that life with the world.*

Think of how Christmas gifts are often wrapped—sometimes in gold foil, sometimes in plain brown paper—but always with the expectation that something precious lies inside. God's gift to us in Christ is no different, except that this gift cannot be contained by any wrapping. It is too vast. The love that flows from God to us in Jesus is, as Torrance puts it, “absolutely unstinting and infinitely lavish.” And so, when we are truly touched by this gift, we realize that the way to respond is not to keep it for ourselves, but give it away. The same generosity that God has conveyed to us calls us to be generous in turn. In fact, when we grasp that we have already been given everything—everything that really matters, everything that will last beyond this world—our own giving becomes an inevitable overflow.

Think also for a moment about the Church, the Body of Christ. God has given us the gift of the Church, not simply as a place to gather like a club, but as a community through which His love continues to flow into the world. This Christmas, we might ask ourselves: How does our giving to others reflect the love of Christ to us? How do our gifts of our talents, treasures, acts of service, and hospitality portray God's greatest gift, especially within the worshipping community to which He has called us?

This is where the hammer hits the nail for us as a church. The ministry we are called to, the work of loving our neighbors, of reaching out beyond our walls, requires not just faith but resources. This is also why come together—not only to receive but to give. As we look ahead to the future or of and the pressing needs around us, the call is clear: we are all called to participate in God's generosity, the generosity through which He “did not spare his own Son, but gave Him up for us all...” (Rom. 8:32).

Torrance offers these words that ring with hope: “If God is with us, there is nothing that can prevail against us. If God has given us His own Son in the birth of Jesus, then He has already given us everything.” This is the true Christmas miracle—not just that Christ was born, but that He came so that we, too, might “have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10). The beautiful paradox of the gospel is that as we give we more fully discover the abundant life God has promised and imparted to us in Christ. In our giving as Christians, we join the angels, shepherds, and wise men in proclaiming the good news: *God is with us.*

