

Sunday 26th December 2021
Mark 1:9-15
Rev. George MacDonald
Brightons Parish Church

Thank-you. Please be seated.

As we said earlier, today is all about gifts, giving and receiving of gifts. And gifts were brought to Jesus of course. We know the story so well, and the Magi brought those three gifts and they may have seemed a little bit odd, those gifts, because they aren't the typical gifts that you would give to a baby.

Somebody once said that the three wise guys weren't so wise after all, because they should have sent their wives to do the Christmas shopping and they would have come back with a nice warm blankie, and a ton of good formula and maybe something else to make that baby Jesus more comfortable. But these gifts were prophetic gifts.

And one of the gifts, the gift of gold, was a gift symbolizing and prophesying about the nature of this King that was born. Gold was for kings, and that gift of gold was for The King of all time, Jesus Christ.

Frankincense says, well, frankincense was often used as a sweet-smelling perfume, you probably wouldn't wear it today mind you, but it was it was in that time a very expensive perfume also used as a form of incense during prayer times as well. So there was a sense in that it was a message to God, a sweet smelling smell for God as well.

And then, of course, there was myrrh. You remember that myrrh was the one thing that was brought to Jesus and a gift that He refused on the cross. He refused the gift of myrrh on the cross because myrrh is also used as a preservative and a painkiller and when that gift of myrrh was offered to Him on the cross, He refused to drink it. So, that was a gift that Jesus had to turn away from, strangely enough.

And, of course, there are other gifts as well, that Jesus gave to us. He received gifts, I'm going to look at maybe three of the gifts that Jesus gives to us and I've brought them along here.

And I've got them in the bag and I've got little items to remind me of those gifts and we were going to get the children to open them up for us. But, just to be on the safe side with all the new rules and regulations, I'm going to open up gift number one to see what it is, what this wonderful gift is.

That reminds us of what Jesus actually gave to us? Does anybody know what that is? Nobody? A nightlight, it is. It's a nightlight, and this is my own little nightlight. Now, the nightlight is an amazing thing. It gives light but it only switches on when it's dark. So, you don't really think about it but when it gets dark it's there, and I use this at night. I sometimes get up at night to get a drink of water and it stops me falling over my shoes while I'm going to get my drink of water. So, it comes on when it's dark and sometimes we use it when we are afraid of the dark as well. So many children have a nightlight because they're a little bit scared of the dark and they don't know what's there and the little nightlight - Do they have nightlights, your children, have nightlights as well? – Yeah, yeah - any of the older folk have night lights? - well the only one, Eric you've got

a nightlight as well that's great, okay. So, that's a very, very precious gift and sometimes all of us are a little bit afraid of the dark, we're not quite sure what lies ahead of us in the dark, so we need alight to shine in the dark and Jesus said 'I'm the light of the world'. He shines for us and especially, especially when it's dark for us, and sometimes we are afraid because we've done something in the past and that puts light on that darkness as well and Jesus came to sort out the past for us, to see it, to dispose of it, and to go into that dark place and make it light again. So it reminds us of that sometimes we're a bit worried about the future, the future lies ahead of all of us, we don't know what the new year has to offer for us, but God is in the future and we know that that dark future also has a light, because Christ is ahead of us and He knows what's there, and we can know that, if Christ knows, it's okay with us as well.

The first gift given us through the birth of Jesus the angel said to them 'Don't be afraid.' The baby in Bethlehem's manger grew up to be a man who promised us freedom from fear and darkness. He said to his followers 'Therefore, I say to you, do not worry about your life what you would eat or what you will drink nor about your body, what you will wear, what you will put on, for your Heavenly Father knows what you need and that you need all these things but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be given to you, So, do not worry about tomorrow.' Jesus came to make sure that the darkness of tomorrow will have the light of the knowledge of Christ/ 'I am the resurrection and the life,' he said 'he who believes in me though he may die, he shall live.' even in the darkest place that we can think of, dead and dying, yet there too, there to, the light shines as well. A wonderful Christmas gift from Jesus, light in the darkness. Do not be afraid.

And then we've got another wee gift here as well. There's gift number two. I'm going to open that one up. Let's just have a look, now. Ah, it's the same one it's come back to haunt me again, there we go, all right. Well, that's the gift of good news, that's the gift of good news and remember what the angel said 'I'm here with good news.' said the angel 'This very day in David's town, your savior was born.' Jesus, and of course that savior's name Jesus had a very special meaning because the word Jesus in Hebrew means rescuer and we often talk about savior but in fact it's more like deliverer or rescuer. And Jesus came to rescue us. He came as light in a dark world and He came with a purpose and His purpose, His destiny in fact was to rescue His people. 'And she will have a son and you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.' And Jesus wants us to come to Him, He can't come to us but He wants us to come to Him to be rescued, not run away from Him but to come to Him and so, we do have to do two things to Jesus. When Jesus went preaching the gospel He preached two things.

He said 'The kingdom is near, believe and repent.' Two things, and they are very closely associated with each other because if we believe and we turn to God we've also got to turn away from the past and turn away from the bad things in our lives. So, believe, turn to God, repent, turn from sin. And so, we come with that good news gift.

But Jesus came as a rescuer, a savior, The Messiah, and then we've got another little gift last one, and here we go. Ah this was a card that we received and can you see what it is? What does a dove symbolize? Peace and love. Symbolizes peace. And, of course, that was the other gift as well. The third gift, 'Peace on earth to those with whom he is Pleased.' Now, I don't know about you, but if my wife is not pleased with me, I get no peace, I can tell you that now that's for sure, and so when we want to please God we need to do something. We need to be right with Him, we need to be right with Him and if we are right with Him then we have the peace with God and the peace of God. And so, peace is a wonderful gift. It's not just a card, it's a reality, it's a reality. Jesus, of course, was called The Prince of Peace, The Prince of Peace. He knew all about peace. He didn't have a lot of peace in His life mechanically speaking, but theologically speaking, He did have peace. He had peace with His Father. He was prepared to do many things which normal people would not have been able to do and He did it because He had peace and He was prepared to share that peace. And you know one of the first things Jesus said when he rose from the grave was 'Peace be unto you.' He said to them. He blessed His followers. He said 'Peace be unto you. My peace I give unto you, not as the world gives.' A special peace. And Christ has given us that peace. That's His wonderful gift to us and it's a gift that we can share. We can share. We have to be peacemakers, peace givers, and sometimes we think it's nations who fight, it's nations who disrupt the world, but behind the nations, in the nations, are people and peace starts with one person, starts with you, and if you can share peace with an R factor of two, and we know what the R factor is now of course - if one person gets it and shares it with two people it really explodes, we've seen it happening. Peace works in exactly the same way. If we are going out into the world of an R factor of two or more, and if one person tells two other people about the peace of Christ and why, then the Gospel will explode in the world, and that's the way Christianity has always been modeled, to go along in the world people sharing it from generation to generation/ So, it's important that we tell our children and we tell our grandchildren and they learn to tell others that there's no other way that the gospel can be shared. That gift, of course, the gift of peace has to be shared wherever we are in the world as well.

And so, in Romans 5 Paul says 'Therefore, having been made right with God by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord, Jesus Christ.'

Three gifts of Christmas and these can be opened at any time, not just Christmas, and sometimes it's a bit sad that we stop the fighting just for a day or two around about Christmas time. That's not the story of Christmas. The story of Christmas is that Christ is here, He's Emmanuel, He's God with us, night and day, He is with us in every area of Life, He is with us, and so we never stop opening the three gifts of Christmas, a special reason in a special season. But also, in the season of our lives God has given those gifts to us all:

the gift of light in our darkness, to not be afraid
the gift of good news, the good news of salvation, and
the gift of peace, a gift well worth sharing.

And we've been given those special gifts of Jesus to share with others and, just like we can hand out these little candy canes, so we can hand out the message of hope and joy and good will and peace and salvation to others around us. Not only can we do it, we must do it. We have been asked to do it, we have been commanded to do it. And so, Christmas is also a command of joy to be shared in the world and peace as well.

Have a great new year when it comes and enjoy your gifts well into 2022 and way beyond as well.

Let us pray together:

Gracious Father, You gave us the gift of life and made each one of us to be special in Your sight. We thank You for the gift of children. We thank You for Scott and Gill and their growing family, for the new boy has been born as a brother to Hope. We thank You for all our children. We thank You for our grandchildren. Such special gifts for us.

You love us and you want to give all your children good gifts so, we thank You today for every gift at Christmas.

The gift of family. The gift of love. The gift of Jesus and the gift of Peace.

We ask that you would be with all those today who may be afraid or suffering or poor or in a dark place. Help those who are sick and worried, who have no homes and no hope and be with all of us here today, that we may know your peace and your presence. Help us to go out to share Your good news gift with those around us so that the light of Jesus we tried in us and through us into every dark place in this world.

We pray this in Jesus name. That same Jesus who grew up to teach His followers to pray together:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever.
Amen

Our closing hymn is a perennial favorite.