

Gift Without the Wrapping

Matthew 2:1-12

December 19, 2021

Today's sermon is a continuation from last week's sermon. Last Sunday, we talked about the question John the Baptist raised to Jesus. He asked, "Are you the Messiah or should we wait for someone else?" Jesus said that John the Baptist was "the Elijah" who would come to prepare the way for the Messiah.¹ Then I said that the question John the Baptist asked Jesus was now directed toward us. As followers of Christ, we are supposed to continue Jesus' ministry of compassion and restoration in this world. So, John the Baptist is now asking us, you and me, "Are you the one who is carrying the ministry of Jesus? Or should we look for someone else? Are you the one who is building the Kingdom of God? Or should we look for someone else?" I said these are the incarnation questions we must ask ourselves in this season of Advent and Christmas.

We are just a few days away from Christmas. People are busy preparing for Christmas celebrations. After the holidays are over, we will be left with several trash bags full of the crinkled shiny papers, the gift-wraps. Do you know how much trash we create each year just from gift wraps, bags, ribbon and laces? We create about four million tons of trash just from the gift wraps, bags and ribbons? That's a lot of trash. To be environmentally friendly, a lot of things have changed to paperless options. For example, instead of Christmas cards, we send a text message. We purchase a gift online and send it directly to the intended recipient instead of receiving it ourselves and wrap it and then send it. Still, we are creating a tremendous amount of trash just from the gift-wrapping. Thankfully, most of these gift-wraps are made out of recycled papers, but still approximately 30 million trees are cut down each and every year to make the wrapping papers.²

Why do we wrap gifts? In 1992, Dr. Daniel Howard, a professor of marketing at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, conducted a psychological study on whether gift wrap had a positive effect on the recipient. It was to find out how gift-wraps affect people's mood when they receive a gift. What he learned is that when people receive a beautifully wrapped gift, they feel happier and more joyous than when they receive a poorly wrapped or unwrapped gift. They also

¹ Malachi 3:1.

² [Why Do We Wrap Gifts? A Brief History Of Wrapping Paper \(bustle.com\)](https://www.bustle.com/story/why-do-we-wrap-gifts-a-brief-history-of-wrapping-paper-120187)

tend to think the gift is more special, more favorable when it is beautifully wrapped. People appreciate nicely wrapped presents.³

Although the tradition or the practice of wrapping gifts started in ancient China in 2nd Century BC, the Western world didn't start it until 20th Century. It actually started with the Hall brothers who started the Hallmark Company. They owned a stationary store in Kansas City, and they came up with the idea of gift-wrapping papers.⁴

Today, there are many companies that produce gift-wraps. Actually, the wrapping paper business is a big business. Its global market value is well over 17 billion dollars as of 2020.⁵

Most of us wrap gifts with beautiful wrappers. We would do that for any gift, but more so for Christmas gifts. However, have you noticed that the very gift God has given us on the first Christmas Day was the gift that was not wrapped at all? It was a naked-gift in a literal sense. God's gift was an unwrapped gift. The baby Jesus was born just like any other baby – naked. Would it be possible that this nakedness could be more theological than biological?

In fact, the whole Christmas story involves various gifts. According to the Book of Matthew, the wise men opened their treasures and presented three gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. But it doesn't mention anything about the gift wraps. There is no mention of gift box, or gift bag or any type of wrapper. Does this mean that the gifts were not wrapped? If they were not wrapped, why weren't they? Maybe it was because of impracticality. It was not practical to carry a beautifully wrapped gift in a long-distance travel. It could easily be damaged on the way.

American theologian Leonard Sweet speculates that the magi's gifts were not wrapped. Almost jokingly, he says the reason why their gifts were not wrapped could be related to the magi's gender. Wrapping a gift is not a male thing. Most men don't see the value of gift-wrapping. A typical man thinks that when you give a gift, as soon as people receive the gift, they ripped the wrapper and look at the gift. They don't pay attention to the wrapper. The wrapper is thrown away. What they keep is the gift; not the wrapper. So, what is the point of putting a lot of effort in wrapping the gift beautifully? According to Leonard

³ [The Psychology Behind Wrapping Paper - SMU](#)

⁴ [Why Do We Wrap Gifts? A Brief History Of Wrapping Paper \(bustle.com\)](#)

⁵ [Gift Wrapping Products Market Size, Share | Industry Report, 2019-2025 \(grandviewresearch.com\)](#)

Sweet, that is how most men think.⁶ Maybe he has a point. but the market doesn't agree with that.

Furthermore, I am not sure if all men agree with Dr. Sweet. Regardless of gender, most of people think that not only the gift is important but also the presentation of the gift. People actually appreciate a nicely wrapped gift better. They notice how the gift is wrapped. Yes, they rip off the wrapper and throw it away but they DO notice how it is wrapped, and that affects their feelings.

Whether the magi's gifts were wrapped or not is something we will never know because we were not there, and the Bible does not say anything about it. But one thing we do know for sure is that God's gift, baby Jesus, was not born wrapped.

Now hold that thought for a moment. I will come back to that.

Now, let us think about the baby Jesus for a moment. Have you ever wondered why Jesus came as a baby? Why did he come as a helpless little child? Why not just come down from heaven accompanied by thousands of angels? Wouldn't that be more dramatic? Wouldn't people all over the world notice it? Wouldn't people worship him? Wouldn't it guarantee that all people would listen to him? King Herod would have fallen on his knees and worshipped him, instead of trying to kill him.

So why did Jesus come as a baby? Again, we may speculate in many ways. I want to suggest a few.

First, babies are fragile. They need to be nursed and nurtured. You must handle babies with extreme care. God's gift of himself came as a baby, so that we would take good care of our relationship with God. When we become a follower of Christ, our initial relationship with God is very fragile like a baby. It needs to be protected and nurtured. It needs to be fed, and taken care of, just like a baby.

Your whole life changes when you have a baby. Your life is altered based on the needs of the baby. You lose your sleep. You have to give up some of your favorite activities, because the baby needs you. In a way, our relationship with God is like that. Some of our activities will need to be changed. We need to do new things in order to nurture our relationship with God. We need to spend time with God. We need to make time to pray. We need to feed our relationship with

⁶ From Leonard Sweet's sermon, "Undercooked Turkey and Unwrapped Gifts", www.esermons.com.

God with his words. We need to read the Scripture, meditate on it, and obey it. If we don't do these things, our relationship with the Lord will not grow strong. Can a baby grow strong without a proper care? Our relationship with God is like that. Perhaps the reason why Jesus came as a baby was to teach us that we need to take care of our relationship with God.

Second, when you have a baby all your attention goes to the baby. You want to make sure the baby is comfortable and well taken care of.

Let's say you are a mother who just had a baby and some people came to visit you. They came to see the baby. After seeing the baby, you and your guests sit in the kitchen or living room visiting. Your baby is sleeping in the baby's room some distance away. Everyone is talking, laughing and enjoying each other's company. While you're engaged in a conversation, you hear the baby's cry. Your guests don't notice it. They don't hear it but you do, because you are the mother. It usually happens that way. The mother's attention is always with the baby.

The gift of God has come as a baby, so that we would put our attention on that baby, our relationship with God. Our relationship with God is fragile, at least at the beginning. It needs to be protected and nurtured. Like the mother whose attention is always on the baby, our attention should always be on our relationship with God. In all our activities, we need to be mindful of our relationship with God.

About the unwrapped gift of God, why was God's gift unwrapped? Would it be possible that he came as an unwrapped gift so that we might wrap him with ourselves? In a way we become like the wrapper. The gift of God, Jesus Christ is wrapped in us, in our words, gestures, and character. Not in a literal sense, of course, but figuratively, we, as the followers of Christ, become like the wrappers, carrying the Lord Jesus in ourselves.

So, what kind of wrappers are we? How are we presenting Jesus with our character? Do people see Jesus in us, in our words and gestures? Do people see Jesus in our decisions and the way we live? What is it that you do to show Jesus in your life? What is it that you do to build up the Kingdom of God? Or should God, should the Church, should the world look for someone else to do that?

We have learned that gift-wrapping is very important in how people receive and react to the gift. How do people, both believers and non-believers, react to Jesus by looking at your own life? Jesus came as an unwrapped gift, so that we might wrap him with our own lives.