

Matthew 5:1-12

December 24, 2007 – CHRISTMAS EVE

What Gifts Shall I Bring the Christ-Child?

✧ **He gives the blessings.** (vv.1-9)

✧ **We kneel in holy joy.** (vv.10-12)

In the name of Jesus, God's own Son and His greatest Gift to all, dear rejoicing Christians:

We're in that "warm and fuzzy season of the year" that often brings out the best in people and certainly warms our hearts in a cold Minnesota winter. Opening the mailbox to cards and letters these days seems to make the stars shine brighter even with the sun going down so early. But you know about the time the days start getting longer some of your mail will too. Mid-January will find many of us wishing there was a warm and fuzzy version of a credit card bill. So what if you kept opening your mail expecting the worst, and every single bill said, "Pay your debt by loving your neighbor as yourself"? You call the billing department to see what's up, and a well-trained professional explains: "Be kind to your wife and respect your husband. Love your kids with that warm firmness that gives them a sense of security and achievement. Turn the other cheek. And if you have to defend yourself, show mercy on your enemies like your heavenly Father who *"causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."* (Matthew 5:45 NIV) Pay us back by caring for others."

Dear friends, that's the bill God gives each of us this Christmas. If you pick up a baby, you're holding all of him. If you hold Jesus close in your heart, you're holding close all the loving kindness and tender mercy of God. You don't get part of Him, you get all, *"For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in [Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."* (Colossians 1:19f NIV)

✧ **He gives the blessings.** (vv.1-9)

Sometimes we feel too much like the "Little Drummer Boy," wondering what we should bring as gifts to God. The song is right in the way it expresses childlike love and how God truly does receive all our prayers and praises in Jesus' Name. Some thirty years after the first Christmas, Jesus would show us the heart of God by taking the children up in arms and blessing them over the objections of His disciples. Christmas proves how little use God almighty has for human pomp and power because He who created all things became a Child to be born in the most humble circumstances we could not have imagined. And there He showed the awesome answer to the question of the "Little Drummer Boy," **What Gifts Shall I Bring the Christ-Child?** What a question. What an answer: **He gives the blessings.**

God did not send His Son down to this earth for everyone to come for "warm fuzzies," then wander back into the darkness of guilt and fear. He wants us to see on this Holy Night how all of Jesus little life was aimed at big blessings. So as we behold that Baby in His manger bed, think ahead to the time Jesus sat with His disciples and preached His most famous *Sermon on the Mount* in verses we call "The Beatitudes." Some have rephrased that as "The Be-Attitudes," because Jesus is showing us the kind of attitudes He creates in our hearts when we put our faith and trust in Him.

But none of us can do this by counseling for "a new attitude" or giving ourselves an "attitude adjustment." About the time you think you're humble, your pride sends you into a skid on glare ice. You might think you're ready to mourn, but we always choose the wrong things to be sad about. You might even look back on some time in your life when you felt meek and mild, but your disappointment is now asking, "What did it get me?" Our sinful heart can't help asking, "What's in it for me?" even though God created us to love and worship Him alone, not our own selfish desires. So let's look at a few of the characters of Christmas and see how God gave Christmas **blessings** to them.

The old priest named Zechariah was not *“poor in spirit”* when the angel Gabriel announced a son for him and Elizabeth. Zechariah’s doubt got him nine months of *“dumb, and unable to speak”* until the Lord’s promise came true. But by that humbling from God, the ancient Jewish believer received God’s rule in his heart and sang in the overflow of the Holy Spirit: *“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people.”* (Luke 1:68 NIV)

Jesus says, *“Blessed are those who mourn,”* but is that what Herod was doing when he found out from the Wise Men that a star announced the birth of the King of the Jews? His response was to kill all the baby boys in Bethlehem to rid himself of a rival. And those who mourned at the first bloodshed because of Christ were all the mothers of those little baby boys. And still, God mercifully kept His promise to them and comforted them in their grief by the resurrection Christ came to bring for us all.

Where could you find a more beautiful example of the *“blessed...meek”* than the young maiden Mary in her lonely room, hearing the angel Gabriel explain how her virgin womb would hold the Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit? In her Spirit-inspired meekness, she answer in faith’s dear simplicity, *“I am the Lord’s servant....May it be to me as you have said.”* (Luke 1:38 NIV) Still today we honor her as the mother of our Lord who gave her even more than the earth by His gift of eternal life. In what we call the Song of Mary, the *Magnificat*, Mary said, *“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.”* (Luke 1:46-50 NIV)

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And yet when Jesus was only a few weeks old, an old man named *Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”* (Luke 2:34-35 NIV) Could Christmas be so short, the bill so soon?

“Warm,” but not “fuzzy,” Jesus says, *“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

According to the Bible this Baby born to the virgin Mary is the only begotten Son of God, the Word of God incarnate, the last and greatest Prophet to whom all the others pointed. Sometimes Christians wonder what was the turning point that the ancient Jewish people began to reject the promised Messiah. But Jesus would grow up to show from the earliest records that they rebelled against their favorite prophet, of whom Jesus said, *“If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.”* (John 5:46 NIV) The most beautiful evangelist of the Old Testament, Isaiah, lamented, *“Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”* (Isaiah 53:1 NIV)

This is how we know that when Jesus says you are *“blessed”* in the *Beatitudes*, He means far more than happy. Otherwise, how could you cope with Christmas if you suffered the loss of a loved one through sickness, rejection or death? And how could we be “happy” with people persecuting us for our faith? No, *“blessed”* in the Biblical sense means you have the solid promise of God’s Word to work out all things for your good and finally bring you home to heaven. God gave His finest guarantee when He granted us His one and only Son to be born of the virgin Mary, who *“treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”* (Luke 2:19 NIV) Mary was glad to **kneel in holy joy.**

When you trust in Jesus as your Savior, you can’t help asking with the “Little Drummer Boy” and believers everywhere this Holy Night: **What Gifts Shall I Bring the Christ-Child?** And whether through smiles or tears we can’t do better than to **kneel in holy joy.** For your heart is the only gift God wants since He has given us His heart – born in the manger as Lord and Savior of all. Amen.