

# "How Do You Wrap an Indescribable Gift?"

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## **John 1:1-14**

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.*

*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*

## **II Corinthians 9:15**

*"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift."*

*"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift."* This sentence was written by St. Paul. It comes at the end of a teaching he gave on giving. He concludes by reminding his listeners that God is the greatest gift giver of all. "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift." I get a kick out of the fact that Paul can't even think of the right adjective to put in front of God's gift. He speaks of Christ both before and after this

verse, so it's very reasonable deduction that he's referring to Christ as God's indescribable gift to us. Indescribable.

Christmas, of course, is about the greatest gift ever given. It's one of the reasons we give gifts to one another at Christmas - why we shower our loved ones with gifts. Because God has showered us with gifts. God has given to us, so graciously, so overwhelmingly in Christ.

Think about the Advent Wreath and the meaning of the four candles. There truly is hope in Christ, peace in Christ, joy in Christ and love in Jesus Christ. What a gift!

So let me ask this question - *how do you wrap an indescribable gift?* But how did God wrap this indescribable gift to us?

You know, some people take wrapping very seriously. I'll bet there's some people in this room who are "wrappaholics." - addicted to wrapping, compulsive perfectionists when it comes to wrapping presents. And they spend more time wrapping their gifts than most of us spending buying them! And they wrap them so tightly. It takes the "jaws of life" to get them open! And they put fancy things on top of the gifts - not just those self-adhesive bows, but really frilly, elegant, beautiful creations! "I hate to open this. It's so pretty!"

You know, some gifts are hard to wrap. I've known people that gave their child a puppy for Christmas. How do you wrap a puppy? How do you wrap skis? How do you wrap a horse? How do you wrap a piano? Mary wrapped Jesus in swaddling cloths (bands of cloth) and laid him in a manger. How did God wrap the indescribable gift of Jesus?

### **I. First of all, God wrapped this gift in prophesy.**

God did not just spring this gift on the world as a big surprise. The Jews had been longing for a Messiah, a Savior, for centuries. And they had been prepared for his coming by prophesy - predictions - writings of the prophets. The Prophet Isaiah wrote the most about it.

A. He said, *"One day a young woman shall bear a son. And this child shall be called, "Emmanuel," God with us."* God coming to earth as a baby.

B. A little later he'd write, *"For unto us a child has been born. Unto us a son has been given . . . . and he shall be called 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."*

C. Isaiah also wrote about a suffering Messiah, one who would be punished for the sins of the people. Isaiah chapter 53 became a very important chapter for Jesus and for the earliest Christians in understanding the Cross of Christ.

*Vss. 4-6: Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.*

*Vs. 10 - Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper.* (This was written hundreds of years before Christ was born. God was preparing the people.)

D. The Prophet Micah also helped prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah.

He even happened to mention the place of his birth.

*Micah 5:2 But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.*

So God prepared the people for the Gift of Christ by wrapping him in Prophecy.

## **II. But just as importantly, God also wrapped him in History.**

He wrapped Jesus in history.

Galatians 4:4 says, *"In the fullness of time God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the (Old Testament) law, in order to redeem those under the law."* "In the fullness of time" means, at just the right time, at exactly the precise moment. God entered this world . . . right on schedule. A young woman named Mary is found to be "with child." She was engaged to a man named Joseph, who just happens to be a descendent of King David. The Messiah was to be in the line of David. At just the right time Caesar Augustus orders that a census be taken. Each man has to return to the town of his roots to be counted. Joseph & Mary just happened to be in Bethlehem, David's city, at just the right time for her to give birth to the Messiah in Bethlehem.

So the picture the Bible paints is that God's plans for humanity were not haphazard. They were not a last-ditch attempt at our salvation. It seems to have been all planned out. History bears this out in several ways.

### **A. First of all, the First Century world had a common language.**

Because of Alexander the Great the entire Middle East and Western World spoke Greek. Just like English is the common language of today, the language people speak to do business across cultures; in the First Century it was Greek. This is one of the main reasons why Christianity could spread so quickly from country to country - from Jerusalem to Rome to Spain to Egypt to Ethiopia. Everyone spoke Greek. This is also why the New Testament was written down in Greek - so it could be widely read by all.

**B. Secondly, the Romans made it easy for Christianity to spread throughout the world because of all the roads and ships they built for international trade.** Roman roads were built to last and made travel much easier. And the Romans built many ships to promote the economies in the various lands

within the Empire. The roads, the ships and the well-established trade routes made it easy for Christianity to spread throughout the Roman empire.

**C. A Third example of how history was ready for Christ is The Pax Romana - the Peace of Rome.** There have been very few times in world history where there has been a lasting peace. The time of Christ and of early Christianity was such a time. The Peace of Rome lasted over 200 years - 27 BC to 180 AD. This, too, was crucial for the spread of Christianity, as people were free to think about the higher matters of life. So there was a common language, international trade routes, peace in the entire Roman empire, and there was at least one other historical factor that was important -

**D. Jesus was born into an age of Spiritual Unrest.** People were searching for meaning - the great Greek philosophers helped them. And people were searching for God. They had grown tired of the many Greek and Roman gods. Most people believed in one God and they wanted to know this one, real God. And so many what we would call "cults" began to appear. Scholars call them "Mystery Religions." Most of them arose around a charismatic figure, and burned out quickly. But people were searching and they were searching for someone to follow.

Suetonius, the Ancient Roman historian wrote: *"There had spread over all the orient an old and established belief, that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judea to rule the world."*

Josephus, the 2nd Century Jewish historian wrote that, *"Jews had the belief that at that time, one from their country should become governor of the whole earth."*

So Jesus was born into an age of unrest, where people were hoping and searching for someone to follow and for the supernatural. Jesus was born in the fullness of time, at just the right time. So, this Indescribable Gift from God was wrapped in Prophecy and his History, and one more

thing,

### **III. God wrapped him in Mystery.**

Christ was wrapped in mystery. There is a mystery to Christmas, a mystery to celebrate and embrace. God coming to earth, taking on human form and still being God is beyond human logic and reason. John's Gospel speaks about this mystery:

*John 1:1ff - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people . . . . And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*

Some of us are so familiar with those words that they've lost their power. "The Word became flesh." God's message to us took on human form. That is beyond our categories.

Charles Swindoll put it this way: *"Undiminished deity took on perfect humanity, and linking the two natures in one personality, housed in one unique body, the God-man was delivered."*

St. Paul wrote to the Colossians (1:19) that, *"All the fullness of God dwelt in Him (Christ)."* The Christian view of Jesus is that he was 100% God and 100% human. How can that be? How do you wrap your brain around that? You can't. It's a great mystery how that can be.

Charles Wesley put it this way:  
*Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see.  
Hail incarnate deity.  
Please as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel.  
Hark! The Herald angels sing. Glory to the newborn king.*

One of my favorite Christmas readings comes from the longtime newsman,

Harry Reasoner. He wrote about the mystery of Christmas This is called, "*Why I go to Church at Christmas.*"

*So far as I know, all Christian denominations expect their members to go to church at Christmas. It may be the only time, or practically the only time, that some do go to church. You can say that in all societies there has always been a midwinter festival, and that many of the trappings of our Christmas are almost violently pagan. But in the quietness of Christmas morning, you come back to the central fact of the day, ...the birth of God on earth.*

*If this is the anniversary of the appearance of the Lord of the universe in the form of a helpless babe -- it is a very important day. It's so revolutionary an idea that it probably could only have come from a God who is beyond logic, and beyond theology. It has a magnificent appeal.*

*Almost nobody has seen God, and almost nobody has any real idea of what God is like, and the truth is that among men the idea of seeing God suddenly, and standing in a very bright light, is not necessarily a completely comforting and appealing idea! But everyone has seen babies, and most people like them.*

*If God wanted to be loved as well as feared, He moved correctly here. If God wanted to know his people, he moved correctly here; for a baby growing up learns all about people. If God wanted to be intimately a part of human life he moved correctly, for the experience of birth and family-hood is our most intimate and precious experience.*

*So it comes beyond logic. If it is false, we are doomed.*

*If it is true, as it must be, it makes everything else in the world all right.*

God wrapped the gift of Jesus in Prophecy, in History, and in Mystery.

What a wonderful and yet indescribable gift Christ is.

I invite you to take this Gift out again and take a good look at Him.

Make this gift your own, this Christmas and always. Amen.