

Blessed to Receive

Luke 2:15-16, 20; Matthew 2:1-3

You've probably heard it said that "it is more blessed to give, than to receive." It's the sort of thing you hear at this time of year from mothers and fathers and grandparents. It's hard enough to get their attention to explain everything you're hoping for at Christmas, and then they cut you off like that. "It's more blessed to give than to receive."

I agree that generosity is better than greediness, but you know, sometimes it can be pretty hard to receive. Like socks. You know it's going to be a hard Christmas when your Mom goes prowling around saying things like, "I think Benjamin needs some socks." Are you out of your mind?! Seriously – is this the time to be thinking of socks, with ski season coming up and a new airsoft gun on the market? This is Christmas, Mom – not clothes shopping time. She adds, "I bet he needs some underwear, too." Then you know you're sunk. All the other kids are going to be showing off their iPads and smart phones, and you're going to be featuring new underwear. It's hard to be in the holiday spirit when what you're receiving is socks and underwear.

But there's something potentially worse than receiving socks and underwear. What if you did receive an iPad – from your Secret Santa? Wow, an iPad! Are we excited? Or awkward? Especially when you think that you gave your person a cookie – or socks. Now they were very nice socks – Christmas green with red Santa Claus on the side. And it wasn't just any old Oreo cookie – it was one of those huge ones decorated with an angel – just right for the Excelsior Secret Santa. But then you get an iPad. This is definitely extremely awkward.

Christmas is the celebration of God's gift to us of His own beloved Son. But this is the gift that no one wanted to receive. Mary didn't spend her childhood dreaming of becoming an out-of-wedlock teenage mother. Joseph did not plan on marrying a pregnant fiancée – especially one carrying another man's child. And the last thing the shepherds needed was an angel choir. Have you ever spent the night herding animals in the winter? I have. Let me tell you, the only thing you really want is to go inside and sit by Grandmother's cookstove and thaw out.

Jesus is the socks and underwear of God. He's the gift that nobody wanted, but that everyone needs. Think about it. You would be in a tough situation if you didn't have any socks or underwear. Imagine coming to Excelsior without them. You would feel naked. Socks and underwear are not exciting Christmas gifts, but your life would be miserable without them.

Jesus is the same. Mary and Joseph would rather have had a beautiful wedding – without her pregnancy and the trouble of riding to Bethlehem in the winter. But they needed a savior to save them from their sins. The shepherds would rather King Herod had built heated shelters out in the fields – but they recognized that God was doing something astonishing with this baby, and they rejoiced and praised God.

Then there's King Herod. He didn't want Jesus either. He was just fine ruling Judah on his own, and he had no intention of sharing his rule with anyone else – certainly not a baby. Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds were confused by Jesus, but Herod was troubled. Very troubled. The next week he murdered all the babies around Bethlehem to kill Jesus.

You are just like Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and King Herod. You did not come into this world looking for Jesus. You came demanding food. As you grew up you demanded more food, and toys. Now your demands are less overt, but you really want that iPad and smart phone, don't you? But God gave you what you really need most. He gave you Himself.

Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds came to appreciate God's gift, and worshiped Him for it. Herod saw that Jesus would mess with his life, and he tried to prevent that. What about you? Do you worship God, even when He messes with your life? Or are you advancing your own agenda, and push God out of the way when He's not on board? Will you accept God's gift, embarrassing and troublesome as it is, because you really need it?

Jesus is the socks and underwear of God, but He's also the iPad of God. He's the gift that is too big to receive. Jesus is not just a teacher you can learn from, nor a prophet who can inspire you, nor a leader you can follow. He is all these and more. He is life. He is light. He is God – come as a baby, come to you, come to save you.

Jesus embarrasses you, because you can never repay God for this gift. For some of you, that is too much. You will not accept this gift, because it is humiliating. You have always earned your way through life and are in no man's debt. And you would earn your way into heaven, but you will not accept the grace of God's Son.

But for others of you, you will humble yourself and accept this infinite gift. True, you can never repay God, but you know what? God doesn't care. God is just happy to give you His Son. And I hope you will be happy to receive Him. This is one gift that you are blessed to receive.

Jesus is the socks and underwear of God – the gift you didn't ask for, but really need. Jesus is the iPad of God – the gift that is too big to accept, but too good to turn down. Now I hope that puts socks, underwear, and iPads into perspective for you this holiday season.

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December 18, 2013