



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
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EPIPHANY SUNDAY

Regifting Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-12

One of the most enjoyable things to do on Christmas morning is to watch a child open a gift. Ribbons, bows, and paper fly as the excited little boy or girl frantically rips open the package to get to the gift. He laughs with delight when he sees what it is. He takes it out, shakes it, and runs to show it to others in the room. Then he spends the rest of the morning playing with the box!

Although in our nostalgic memory of Jesus' birth as well as in our manger scenes, we have the magi arriving from the East just after the shepherds, scripture suggests that their journey took a bit longer. Jesus was probably around two years old when the Wise Men came bearing gifts for the One for whom the star shone so brightly. Given that he was likely an active toddler when they offered him their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, I can imagine little Jesus sniffing the fragrant presents and then choosing to play with the ornate boxes in which the Magi brought them. After all, what little fellow wants bling and perfume for Christmas? I think Mary might have been more excited about those gifts!

Of course the gifts were appropriate. Sometimes—especially for newborns—we give gifts with meaning: keepsakes like silver rattles, bowls, and pictures frames that really mean more to the parents. Such gifts are really for them. The child won't appreciate such kindness until much later.

We all know that it is not unusual to get a birthday or Christmas gift that doesn't quite match our tastes or our needs. What do you do? You politely thank the person who gave you the gift, you may return it, or, in some cases, regift it.

As some of you know, regifting is tricky business. It takes a certain amount of skill to pull it off. First, you have to plan ahead and make certain that you don't give it back to the person who gave it to you or to someone they know well. Second, you have to try to think of someone who might actually like that gift and make them think that you bought it new just for them.

One of the most “popular” regifting items is fruitcake. I read a great story about regifting fruitcake. A lady has a friend who likes meatloaf and she often makes it for him as a gift. One Christmas she made a meatloaf and, as a joke, wrapped it in shiny foil, added a red bow, and told him it was a “holiday fruitcake.” She knew that he did not like fruitcake at all but supposed he would figure out the joke and enjoy the meatloaf. Instead, he took the package to another party that evening as a hostess gift. When the hostess removed the foil she exclaimed, “This isn’t fruitcake, its meatloaf.” She was further surprised when her guest grabbed the meatloaf back and went home!¹

I discovered that there is actually a website dedicated to regifting. It offers the do’s and don’ts of regifting and has hundreds of hilarious stories. Another funny and true story I discovered involved an elegantly wrapped package which was immediately suspicious to the recipient. The wrapping paper and box were both wet. When she opened the gift she understood why when water gushed out. She had been given a pulsating shower head—and the givers didn’t even bother to drain all the water out!²

Regifting can be useful and fun. I know of one family who realized that they no longer need gifts from each other so they make a donation to a local family to help with Christmas gifts. They still like to have fun and enjoy what they call a “Dirty Santa Party”—“dirty” because the gifts they exchange have to come from the attic. They cannot be bought as gag gifts. Some of those gifts make the rounds from year to year while occasionally someone receives something they really like!

This year we received “re-gift.” Actually I am not certain that it had been received as a gift originally, but it was something these friends had enjoyed themselves for years. It is a beautiful Michael Podesta print. The words form the shape of a Christmas tree and come from the Book of James. They read:

Every
Good gift
And every
Perfect gift is
from above &
Cometh down from
the Father of lights

James 1:17

¹Linda C., “The Fruitcake,” *Regiftable.com* (12/25/2009); available online at: <http://www.regiftable.com>.

²Nancy K., “Re-Wrapped Water,” *Regiftable.com* (12/31/2009); available online at: <http://www.regiftable.com>.

Interspersed within the beautiful calligraphy are the letters that form the name “Immanuel,” certainly the perfect gift from God.

The gift is even more special since the verse reminds me of a very happy time in college when I was keenly aware of God’s generosity toward me.

Although we may practice it ourselves, we make fun of regifting. Most of the time a present we regift is something we don’t need or want. Jesus might have liked to trade in the myrrh for a couple of carved wooden camels to play with . . . a pet donkey to ride . . . or a lamb to run with in the meadows.

I had never heard of it before, but apparently in some places regifting is a long-held tradition. Based on the gospel story that the Magi gave Jesus three gifts, each person in a family receives three gifts with the understanding that one of those presents will be selected to be regifted to someone in another household who cannot afford to buy gifts for their own family.³

Today the Magi remind us that there is one gift we ought to regift – the good and perfect gift of Jesus Christ. The best thing is that we can keep this gift for ourselves while sharing it generously with others. We have all received wonderful and lavish gifts this season as an expression of someone else’s love for us. If you need to pass on that brightly colored sweater with the reindeer head complete with a big red pom pom for a nose to someone else, do so . . . carefully. But remember that you have received a gift which can be given to someone else every day in a myriad of ways. The love of God through Jesus Christ is indeed a gift that continues to give. Thanks be to God!

³Ellen R. “3 Gifts of Christmas,” *Regiftable.com* (12/28/2009); available online at: <http://www.regiftable.com>.

January 6, 2012

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

The world seems so often dark with illness and grief and all kinds of sadness, O God, but when your light breaks through the clouds of our existence, our lives are illumined and vibrant once again. We thank you for not forgetting us, for not leaving us behind to fend for ourselves, and for not forsaking us for heaven's glory.

As we bask in the glow of your radiance, we thank you for the season that has brought us so much joy and peace. We are grateful for time spent with family and friends, for holiday gatherings, and for worship that stirred our souls. We thank you for cheerful greetings that lifted our spirits and for spirited music that warmed our hearts. We are still moved, O God, that you would come to us and live among us as you have.

We ask now that you would visit all who are ill and provide for their needs. Medications, therapies, and the skill and concern of medical personnel will do much to make them well. The love of family and friends will bring comfort and assurance. And an unquestioned sense of your presence will surely bring the peace for which all of us long. Come to us all in our various needs, O God, and make us whole.

On this day when we celebrate the visit and gifts of the Magi, we ask your blessing on our efforts to share the Good News of Christ's coming with other people. Bless all who serve around the world to minister in your name. Bless all who are willing to step across the street to be the presence of Christ for a neighbor. And bless each one who is willing to model Christ's life in this congregation so that we all might be inspired to follow him day by day.

Bless us all, we pray, and fill us with the light of your Spirit so that our light might shine and bring you glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.