

Advent – The Important Arrival!



Many years ago, I read of a family who were facing Christmas with no money for presents. Such was the loving concern they had for each other, they just had to give something - so they planned and searched for pictures of each gift they *would* have bought if they had endless riches. Even the children entered into the plan, hunting high and low, cutting up, keeping their findings secret and wrapping them as if they were real treasures. On Christmas morning they shared their hearts' longings with each other as they discovered wonderful houses, holidays in the sun with golden beaches, diamonds sparkling like starlight, cars polished to perfection – gifts beyond imagining. The excitement grew as they realized what each of them wanted for the others, and they began to make up stories of how they would share their gifts, where they would go in that streamlined car and what they would do wearing their fabulous clothes and jewels. So real was their sharing that they all agreed it was the best Christmas they had ever had! There had been no disappointments, no bickering - just the sheer joy of sharing in giving and receiving each other's loving, heartfelt gifts.

Another Christmas, a little boy had only a very few pennies for a gift for his grandmother, and all he could find was a little upright tin, on the wrapping of which was a picture of her favourite biscuits. He proudly bought it, wrapped it up and gave it to her on Christmas morning. But how his face fell when Nanny's response was "It's empty! It's just an empty tin!"

There are always two sides to a gift. One is the finding of the gift, even though limited by the depth of our purse, and the other is being truly aware of the love that prompted that gift, and accepting it with grace. Sadly, not everyone manages this, as we saw in the case of the little boy. We all know the old saying: "*It is better to give than to receive*", which has its roots in the Bible - but do you know the rest of that saying? "*It is better to give than to receive and giving stretches the soul; will you allow me to stretch my soul?*"

The period leading up to Christmas is known as Advent. It's a time of preparation, a time to remember the 'important arrival' of the incredible gift of the Christ Child, and a time that reminds us that our role is to receive Him into every part of our lives.

In the gospel of John, there is a passage that reads: "*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*"

When we read that slowly to ourselves and savour every word, we find the powerful message emerging that God is handing us the most precious of gifts ever known: Jesus, who is part of God. Then we have the freedom to either accept or reject that gift. All we need to do is to trust the Giver, and once we accept His gift, a new life in Christ begins. Quite simply, we are transformed into a new creation - just by taking hold of this wonderful gift.

So this Advent time, why not take some time to prepare yourself for the best Christmas gift ever - a gift that will stretch your soul and fill your heart with new life, new purpose, new hope, a deeper love and a peace beyond your dreams. That gift is the gift of Jesus.

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