

## Let it go!

I can remember it just like it was yesterday. It was a frosty evening but joy and excitement were singing in the air. We had just finished Christmas Eve Mass and were heading to my grandpa's small but cozy house with the blue carpet, cramming in about 9 aunts and uncles with their spouses, 20 grandchildren and you got it—a literal mountain of presents by the brightly lit Christmas Tree. Within that gigantic pile of glory was one of the best Christmas presents I've ever received and I remember it to this day: a Nintendo 64 with one of the classic, classic games of all time—Zelda: Ocarina of time.

**Christmas is a great time to give and receive gifts, but as I've reflected on the meaning of Christmas, I've wondered what do gifts have to do with Christmas? If it's Jesus' birthday why do WE get gifts? Can gifts help us understand the true meaning of Christmas?**

See, gift giving wasn't always part of Christmas. Giving gifts on Christmas didn't become commonplace until the 1920s. So is giving gifts a strategy by marketing companies to get people to buy more things? Probably. In light of the modern, commercialization of Christmas which can seem like another opportunity to get more stuff in addition to our birthday, some people can feel cynical about Christmas and how it has lost its true meaning.

In the New York Times article, 'An Atheist can believe in Christmas' Richard Dawkins, one of the New Atheists, writes:

*"So divorced has Christmas become from religion...[and] understanding full well that the phrase retains zero religious significance, I unhesitatingly wish everyone a Merry Christmas."*

Is this true? Is this secular commercialization the reason for our joy at Christmas? Are the yuletide joys we experience only a result of some nice eggnog and delicious turkey?

Fortunately for us this is not the case. This is why we as Catholic Christians celebrate the mystery of Christmas every year. In addition to all the presents and dinners and joyful music and caroling, we ponder again the mystery of Christmas to remind us again of the destiny we are called to, and gift is the perfect lens through which we can see and grasp the significance of Christmas.

This Christmas I was wondering what gift I could get for my goddaughter. One day I saw her watching the movie Frozen and even though she couldn't speak she would utter every third word of the song. 'Maslkj ad GO! Maslkj ad GO!' So I knew ah! That is what I could get her. So I went to the Toys R Us and asked the guy and I looked for the frozen section. Being the uncle of two boys, I have never really watched frozen and so I spent some time learning the characters.

The challenge of finding a gift for another person is more than just buying any material thing. A husband could go to Canadian tire and buy a bag of soil for his wife but that would not go well! Buying a gift for another person requires reading the heart of the other person: 'What gift would give joy to your heart? What does your heart desire?'

Now take this concept of gift and reading hearts and apply it to God. God who knows all things from all eternity, who said: "before I formed you in the womb I knew you". God who formed our tiny beating hearts with all its desires and questions and wonderings, this God who knows our heart through and through and desires to give us the greatest gift ever on Christmas day and what does he give?

*"For God so loved the world that he GAVE his only begotten Son that everyone who believes in him might not perish but have eternal life."*

Jesus? Maybe our first reaction might be like those kids who have been pranked by their parents on Christmas. "mommy why did you give me a rock?" "thanks for the handmade snowmen made from tangerine skin."

However, if we saw the significance of this gift we would stand in awe of the mystery. Think about the songs we sing:

*Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see;  
Hail, th'incarnate Deity:*

*O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant...come and behold him born the king  
of angels.*

This is no birth of any ordinary baby, but the birth of God, the Word through whom all things are made, the Word who is the reflection of God's glory, this

Word became flesh, this Word became a baby who now can utter no words but only cry out in need.

Yet this gift goes even deeper because we have to ask ourselves, "Why did God become man?" The Catechism gives us four reasons: Jesus comes to save us from our sins, to show God's love, to be our model of holiness. But the last reason the Catechism gives us is the most significant: he came to make us God.

*"For the Son of God became man so that we might become God." St Athanasius. St. Thomas Aquinas also said: "The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods."*

This sounds less crazy when we look to the liturgy of the Eucharist. When the deacon or the priest is pouring water in to the chalice, they say a special prayer: *through the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.*

Ah so the mystery becomes clearer. We do not become gods in the sense of having our own planets or becoming omnipotent and omniscient but rather we become 'partakers of the divine nature', we share in the divine nature of Jesus Christ who is the Son of God. We truly become children of God and that is why the Word became flesh so that those who believe in his name will receive power to become children of God.

This may not sound as significant to us but these words are revolutionary. Think about myself and Fr Jonathan. If I changed my last name to Gibson would that make me part of his family? What if I made awesome pizza like Fr Jonathan? Would that make me part of his family? What if I completely shaved my head? Would that make me part of his family? Nothing I could do could make me part of Fr Jonathan's real family. I could be metaphorically part of his family but not actually a part because the blood that flows through his veins is not the same blood as mine, the life that flows through him does not flow through me.

Likewise we cannot do anything to truly become part of God's family, but Jesus became human so that we can partake of the divine nature, so that we can participate in the life of the Son through his Spirit. If I had the spirit of Michael Jordan I would be able to dunk from the free throw line. If I had the spirit of

Mozart I would be able to compose beautiful musical pieces. So imagine if I had the Spirit of God, I would be able to share in the life of God we would truly be able to be like God.

“But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman...that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave but God’s child.”

The same Spirit and life that flows through Jesus flows through our hearts as well. And indeed we receive this gift in baptism where we are given power to be made children of God through the Spirit.

So this Christmas and the rest of the Christmases to come when you give or receive a gift and you are practicing to read the heart of the other person, remember that God has read your heart and has gifted your heart with the greatest gift anyone could ever receive: Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, the Son of God. Yet this gift is given to us not just to gaze upon but to participate in as well.

This is the reason why we come to mass because when we receive Jesus’ body and blood under the form of bread and wine then the same blood that flows through Jesus veins now flows through ours. That is why we receive his body and blood because the more we receive it the more we are transformed, the more he makes us blood brothers and sisters, he truly makes us part of the family of God.