



# **THE PERFECT GIFT FROM ABOVE**

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GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL, NEW BRUNSWICK, CANADA

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2

## **SCRIPTURE READING** **ROMANS 15:4-13 & JAMES 1:17-18 (ESV)**

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**“4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.**

**5 ¶ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,**

**6<sup>3</sup> that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**7 ¶ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.**

**8 For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs,**

**9 and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.”**

**10 And again it is said, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”**

**11 And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.”**

**5 12 And again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.”**

**13 ¶ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” (Ro 15:4-13 ESV)**

6

**“17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.**

**18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” (Jas 1:17-18 ESV)**

7

**THIS IS THE WORD OF GOD TO US**

**THANK YOU FATHER FOR GIVING US YOUR SON**

**AMEN**

During today's sermon, we are going to think about how these scriptures can help us to prepare for the celebration of the first coming of Jesus to this earth.

"And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope."

Isaiah lived years before Jesus came to the earth as the incarnate Son of God. Isaiah was inspired to write about the coming Messiah.

This hope of a liberating Messiah was alive in their minds and dreams. They looked forward to the coming of the Messiah who would free them from the oppression of their enemies. Their idea of what the Messiah would do was to give them a good life on this earth. They did not recognize him. He did not meet their expectations. Their eyes were blinded.

- Jesus did not come with power. He came with humility.
- He was not born in nobility. He was born a carpenter's son.

- He did not come to the earth to conquer with arms of war but to be killed in our place on a wooden cross.
- Instead of hanging out with the powerful at the time, he hung out with the sinners, the sick, the lepers, etc.
- Instead of surrounding himself with the powerful, he surrounded himself with 12 men – ordinary men
  - one disliked - Matthew, the tax collector,
  - John and James has anger problems. Jesus called them Sons of Thunder.
  - Peter and Andrew were fishermen, from Galilee of all places.
- He called himself God, made himself equal with the Father, forgave sins and accepted worship.

This was mind-blowing to the people of his day. They did not recognize who he was, the eternal Son of God.

The Messiah came at the right time to reveal the magnificent plan God has for humanity.

Jesus has come. He has revealed the Father's plan for us. He was God in the flesh. Because he was God he perfectly represented who God is.

As his people, we are blessed to get a glimpse of this magnificent plan, although we do not see it in its fullness yet.

Through faith in Jesus, we have entered the kingdom of God although we have not witnessed or experienced its fullness yet.

God's new covenant people have always recognized the importance of the birth of Jesus. If he had not been born, there would not have been the cross, the resurrection, our liberation from the consequence of sin, etc.

As we remember his birth, its important and we prepare to celebrate.

However, Christmas was not kept in the early church until about the mid-third century.

## **THE FIRST CHURCH CHRISTMAS**

**8** (FROM [HTTPS://WWW.GCI.ORG/ARTICLES/THE-FIRST-CHURCH-CHRISTMAS/](https://www.gci.org/articles/the-first-church-christmas/))

- **~~Joy to the world!~~ Christians look forward to a joyous Christmas season each year. Yet, surprisingly, for the first 300 years of the church's life there was no Christmas celebration of Jesus' birth. Possible reasons include:**
- **The apostolic church had expected that Christ's coming in glory was just around the corner and its worship pointed to the future instead of the past.**
- **The church's primary focus was on Christ's death and resurrection and his presence through the Spirit, which were celebrated during Easter and Pentecost.**

- **Epiphany, or “manifestation,” another early church festival, afforded a remembrance of Jesus’ Incarnation and birth.**
- **There was no corresponding Old Testament festival from which Christmas could emerge, as there had been for Pasha or Easter (Jewish Passover) and the Christian Pentecost (Feast of Weeks).**
- **The date of Jesus’ birthday was, perhaps, not known.**

It is likely first celebration Christmas was likely in A.D. 336 but for sure in A.D. 354.

By the fifth century, the celebration of the birth of Christ was celebrated across the Christian world.

One of the reasons that I am bringing this up is that at times Christians can place more importance on chronologies and dates than on the event itself.

This applies to other celebrations such as the dates of Pentecost, the resurrection of Jesus, etc.

When the writers of the gospel described the birth of Jesus, of primary importance was not dates but the events themselves. What is important is that Jesus came down from heaven, from the Father’s throne to take on our flesh to liberate us from the oppression of sin.

It is interesting, as we read God’s word, that Jesus does not place much importance on the political oppression imposed on the Jewish people by the Roman Empire.

**What he emphasizes throughout Scripture is that we need to return to him in**

## **repentance to be forgiven of our sins.**

God the Father needed to send Jesus to break this oppression of sin which kept us in the grips of death. This was the real problem of humanity.

He came amongst his own and his own did not recognize him because his agenda was not as they expected.

- He came in very humble circumstances.
- He was born to an unwed mother.
- Physically, he was born in the humblest of situations. "And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." (Lu 2:7 ESV)
- His birth was only announced to the lowly in society, notably shepherds. Shortly after, his birth was announced to Gentile kings.
- His birth was hidden from the Jews and the hierarchies of the Jews.
- The angels rejoiced but very few people knew about this celebration at the time of Jesus' birth.
- Mary and Joseph who had a special revelation of his birth also rejoiced!

All in all, it was a very humble birth unbeknownst to the world. Yet, it was the most important birth ever to happen in humanity—notably God reaching down to us and coming down to live with us in the flesh.

I know some, and it is their choice, choose not to participate in the celebration of our Saviour's physical birth because they think it's the wrong date or they think that somehow it is associated with pagan origins.

It's good to be reminded that although we live in this world, we belong to another kingdom. We are sojourners on the earth and as God's people, we take our directives first from God and what he reveals to us in the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit.

As we read the New Testament, no one is ever condemned because they kept some wrong dates. Obviously, this not very important to God.

The next verses show us what is important to God, as we live in His grace.

- **“5 ¶ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,**
- **6 that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ro 15:5-6 ESV)**



<http://www.thelakesanglican.org.au/>

Because God loves us so very much. Because Jesus came to the earth to reconcile us to God as per the Father's will, we can live in harmony with God in Jesus. We are called to extend this harmony to another. We are to be iikeminded. The Strong concordance describes it this way, "to be of the same mind i.e. agreed together, cherish the same views, be harmonious"

God tells us in the Scripture that we have the mind of Christ indwelling in us through the Holy Spirit.

We are to love one another because we are loved by God.

We are not to live in strife, conflicts, rivalry and dissension or discord, jealousy, envy, debt collecting of disappointment and hurts which too often lead to anger and hatred. These passion of the flesh divide us in God's church, in God's family.

Remember we are told that we are the sons and daughters of God the Father. Jesus is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in perfect harmony. We are to do our best to live in such a way with one another. Because we are flawed, we can and will have disagreements. We are to do our best in God's grace to resolve those. Whatever the challenge, as people of the faith, we are

to love one another in our differences.

This is why, as far as it depends on us, we are to live in peace with brothers and sisters in the faith.

Again because we are loved by God and deeply cherished by him as his beloved, we are to treat one another as God treats and loves us.

These qualities are so much more important than dates. Dates only complicate things. We are told that if we don't love our brothers and sisters in 1 John that we do not belong to God.

Jesus has lived a perfect life for us from infancy to adulthood until his death on the cross. All the commands that we read in the Bible stem from the character God and his love for us as demonstrated by the giving of his Son. This is worth celebrating and remembering.

Again, God never says in his word that we are not his because we have dates wrong. That is not important to God.

However, if we do not love our Christian brothers and sisters, he does say that we continue to live in death. **"14 ¶ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."** (1Jo 3:14-15 ESV).



## PURPOSE



With one voice,  
we glorify God,  
the Father of our  
Lord Jesus Christ.

- **“that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ro 15:6 ESV)**

From: [Heatly Spirituality .org](http://HeatlySpirituality.org)

Jesus came to the earth to make this possible. As we individually and communally respond and apply God’s teaching in our lives, we will grow in these qualities to the glory of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This would not be possible if Jesus had not come to the earth to give us a new life and a new heart. Without God, we cannot live in harmony. We needed Jesus to come to liberate us from the tyranny of sin to restore our true humanity.

We realize that we are still in the growth stage. The unity and love of the one triune God is perfect. Rooted in him, the fruit produced in our life will be love, joy, patience, gentleness, kindness, etc. all qualities of character God values. The fruit of the Holy Spirit produces harmony and the ability to live with our differences in his church.



As we read these verses, we remember the ideas Paul is addressing Christians members of God's church.

Again, our welcoming one another is rooted in Christ. How has Christ welcomed us?

He has called us and welcomed us with all of our weaknesses and faults and sins. He not only accepted us but he gave us a new life, a welcome that was completely undeserved!

Once we appreciate the extraordinary and astonishing love of God towards us, we will be able to go forward and welcome others.

There are many others who are not in our denomination who have come to faith in Christ. They may believe differently in secondary matters but in the essentials, they have the same faith as we do. God wants us to welcome them like we have been welcomed.

This word welcome can also be translated "receive or took".

One example where this word is used in the New Testament is when Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos in their home to teach him about the baptism of Jesus. He only

understood the baptism of John (acts 18:24-26).

I guess a good question to ask is how was I received by Jesus?

I am to receive others in the same way.

Jesus came towards us. To welcome others, we are to go towards them.

When new people coming in our midst, how do we welcome them? Do we show ourselves friendly, warm and inviting or do we avoid contact? How do we welcome them outside the church walls?

Our goal – to receive them as Jesus us.

This commandment to live in harmony is for all disciples of Jesus.

It is extending to others what we have been given.

God came to the Jews, to the circumcised to confirm that he was a God for all people, that he loves all people. This is part of the advent celebrations!

It was God's intention that the Gentiles would praise God with his people.

3

# Romans 15:11

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- **“And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.”” (Ro 15:11 ESV)**

# 14 HOPE FOR THE GENTILES. HOPE FOR ALL.

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**From: Heartlight.org**

The first coming of Jesus is the fulfilment of prophecy which shows the trustworthiness of God.

He came as a humble baby. He lived a very humble life being the son of a carpenter. He defeated our greatest and strongest enemy – sin and death - through his death on the cross and resurrection.

As a result, we have the sure hope that one day he will reign over all people. Being such a good King, everyone will place their trust in him.

In that little baby born in Bethlehem resided the hope of humanity! He is the hope of humanity!

We need to remember what James said about God's gifting!

The Perfect Gift from Above

15

EVERY GOOD AND PERFECT GIFT IS FROM ABOVE,  
COMING DOWN FROM THE

**FATHER OF THE  
HEAVENLY LIGHTS,**

who does not change like shifting shadows.

(From: <https://www.praise1065.com>)

What is the greatest gift God has given us?

With one accord we can all say that is his Son Jesus! From all eternity it has been God the Father's good pleasure to give us his Son, who would be sacrificed as the lamb of God for us!

It is such an immense and immeasurable gift that words escape us to describe it!

At Christmas time, children in their innocence show excitement as they open their gifts from under the Christmas tree. Their anticipation is great. They can't hardly sleep. If they do sleep, they are up at the crack of dawn to see the gifts awaiting them!

What a gift it is for God to have inspired his church to celebrate and remember such a great event as the incarnation of Jesus, year after year until his return! When properly understood, what a joyous celebration it is.

16



**And all  
God's  
people  
said:**

**AMEN!**

(From: Pinterest.com)

The Perfect Gift from Above