*The LCA provides this sermon edited for lay-reading, with thanks to the original author.*

Sermon for Christmas Eve

# The Text: Isaiah 9:6

Have you had any trouble finding the right gift for your favourite person this Christmas?

Have you felt under a bit of pressure until the right idea popped into your head?

Maybe you even feel a little anxious sitting here because you know that this year it just didn't quite work out. Or did you work it out sometime ago…and have simply enjoyed putting your plan into action?

It’s exciting when we get the right gift for our favourite person. The right gift that expresses how important they are to us and how appreciative we are of what they have done in our life. Even more so if gift giving is our love language!

What about when it comes to Jesus? I know many of us here love giving to Jesus because of what He has done for us. Do we ever ask though, what is it He really wants? What is the perfect gift?

The gifts of the wise men are in fact the origin of Christmas gift giving. Much later Christians began to symbolically interpret the importance of each gift:

**Gold** - because of Jesus’ royalty;

**Frankincense** - because of His divinity;

And **myrrh -** because of His burial.

That sort of symbolism is okay if we like that sort of thing and it speaks to us and it helps us remember who Jesus is and what He did for us. But do we think God is really all that interested in precious metals and smelly perfumes?

Then again, maybe we don't wonder at all what God wants from us. In fact, we might not even get to church much because we have been hurt by Christians who seemed much keener to take than to give… and we may have been put off the whole Christian thing. We may not be interested in giving when so much has already been taken from us.

Or, we might be a bit wary of this whole God thing because as far as we can see, or have heard, or have experienced, it just seems God wants our money, time and commitment, or a particular lifestyle or a certain type of sexuality or a set of beliefs… and that’s just not us.

Actually, none of those things are what God wants most from any of us. *Some* of these things might follow as God works on us – but that is often something we will only see and have a peace about when we are there. REGARDLESS, none of them are the primary things He wants from us.

There is a warm little story written for the young-at-heart by an influential figure in the Early Church called Heironymus (*Hire-on-e-mus)*. He was otherwise known as St Jerome. Being brief I’m going to read it to you. (quotations following from Giertz: 796 ‘*To live with Christ’)*

‘Often, when I look to Bethlehem…my heart converses with the child Jesus.

I say: “Lord Jesus, You are freezing. You shiver. It is so hard and uncomfortable where You sleep—so that I may be blessed. How will I ever be able to repay?’

Then I think I hear the Child answering: ‘I don't want anything dear Heironymus.

Just wait. Difficult times await Me, in Gethsemane and on the holy cross.’

Then I continue to speak:

‘Dear Christ Child, I have to give You something. I’ll give You all my money.’

The Child answers: ‘the heavens and the earth are Mine. I don't need your money.

Give it to the poor, and I will receive it as if it was given to Me.’

Then I continue:

‘Dear Christ Child, I will gladly do that, but I still have to give something to You.

Otherwise my sorrow will kill me.’

Then the Child says:

‘Dear Heironymus, since you are so generous, I will tell you what you can give to Me. Give Me your sins. Give me your bad conscience and your perdition!’ *[Perdition means utter ruin or damnation]*

I answer: ‘What will You do with them?’

Christ answers me: ‘I will take them upon My shoulders. They will be My glory and My Kingdom. Isaiah prophesied that I would bear your sins, and take them away.’

Then I begin to cry and say:

‘Child, dear Christ Child, You move my heart to tears. I thought You wanted to have something of mine that was good, and You only want to have the evil within me. Take away what is mine! Give me what is Yours so I will be free from sin, and certain of eternal life!’” {End of story}.

What does Jesus want from us?

Put simply: **our worst**!

Our *perfect* gift to Him – should we be inclined to give a gift to the One who first gave Himself – is actually Our imperfection.

Whether we be a “lifer” in the Christian faith, a sceptic or just someone a little wary, Jesus is not asking for treasures, times and ideologies. He is just asking that He be able to take our sins upon His shoulders.

And while we are at it – dump sins’ effect on Him as well. This includes our hurts, inadequacies, troubles, anxieties, difficulties, guilt, shame and disappointments with self and others. All of that too gets nailed with Jesus to the cross when we trust in Him.

For to us God has given a Son who was laid in manger…

…and later died on that cross of wood for us…

…then showed He had conquered sin by coming out of His tomb of death for us…

This means the thing God wants from us – and it is the perfect gift to Him - is to trust His work.

Jesus is the gift of God. A Son with wide shoulders that want to bear, not our silver or our sacrifice, but our sin - the perfect gift for Him.

His is a Government that is about restoration and building up, not punishment and taxation – taking our stuff from us. For His testimony to us is that in exchange for taking our imperfection on His perfect shoulders He **will** bring us into His Kingdom of forgiveness that lasts forever.

That **is**His perfect gift to us this Christmas.

Let’s pray – it's a little prayer that accompanied that story by Jerome and is written by a former Bishop of Sweden who has now gone to rest eternally with His Lord:

Dear Jesus,

I want to kneel by your crib.

I know I can never thank you enough.

I know I can’t give you anything that would sufficiently thank you for what you’ve done.

But since you want everything evil in me, I will give you everything: my life and my heart, my past and my sins, my future and my eternity.

I wouldn't dare come to you if you hadn't come to me.

But now you are here, and I know it’s for my sake.

Therefore I kneel here and thank you, Jesus Child, Prince of Peace, you who are called wonderful Counsellor and Mighty God.

Amen.