



“Why do we give gifts to each other at Christmas when Jesus is the One with the birthday?”

That’s a really good question - one I’ve received more than once.

If you do like I did and search the internet for answers to that question, you’ll come up with lots of speculation about the origin of gift giving. Some folks are convinced it was a pagan practice that started as a way of celebrating the fact that the amount of sunlight finally starts to increase again after the winter solstice (Dec. 21). Others explain that Saint Nicholas was noted for giving gifts of money to the poor (and tossing those gifts through windows in stockings - not down chimneys). Others feel that the gift-giving craze got started in earnest in response to Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol, because no one wanted to be called a “Scrooge.” And, of course, there is the truth that the practice is fueled by retailers who want to sell stuff, so they convince us to buy their stuff (not for selfish reasons, but to give to others).

Each of those explanations may play a part.

But the real question is, “No matter how it got started, what is our motivation for continuing the practice?”

I’m going to suggest a couple for you - reasons for giving gifts that are actually found in the Bible.

1) We read at the end of the book of Esther that God’s people gave each other gifts as a way to celebrate God sparing His people from being destroyed.

I’d say that motivation translates very well to our Christmas situation. God sent His Son into our world that first Christmas for the express purpose of sparing us from being destroyed by our sin. If the Israelites of long-ago celebrated God saving them by giving gifts of food to each other, isn’t it appropriate to expand the gifts beyond food in response to the greatest salvation of all - our eternal one.?!

2) Gift are given to show appreciation and thanks. That’s why we bring our offering gifts to God each Sunday. Christmas is as good a time as any to give gifts to other people as a way of saying, “Thanks for what you do.”

3) Gifts can be given to show honor. The magi brought their gold, frankincense and myrrh to honor Jesus as the King of the Jews.

4) But mostly gifts are given to show you care. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son....

Bottom line: It really doesn’t matter how the practice got its start. What does matter is that you continue the practice with a good motivation - and “just because it’s always been done that way” isn’t a real good reason! Pick one of the reasons listed above and you will have a good, biblical motivation for your gift-giving.

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net