

**St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins - Curate

Scripture: Isaiah 9: 2-4, 6-7

***A Son Is Given***

I can remember about 10 years ago when I really wanted for Christmas a specific bass guitar. It was the same type that Paul McCartney played. I imagined how Marilyn would wrap it and I checked the tree daily, sometimes several times to see if it made its way under it.

On Christmas morning I was there with the video camera to catch John and Theresa opening presents, and I would wait until everyone was done un-wrapping their gifts. As I scanned the presents I didn't see anything that was big enough to be the guitar. Where could it be – or worse was it even here?

I finally got to open my presents and I realized that the one gift that I really wanted was nowhere under the tree. I felt crushed. I will never forget that Christmas morning, because after a few minutes Marilyn said she forgot something upstairs. A few moments later she came into the room carrying a large wrapped box – which had the case and the guitar I had been hoping for. I was so thrilled! It was actually more exciting because it came in a way that I didn't expect.

The real gift of Christmas doesn't come under the tree. The real gift of Christmas comes to us in ways we might not expect. The real gift of Christmas comes from one who loves us enough to give us the most costly gift of all. "*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.*" **John 3:16**

As we go through the preparation of Advent and the hope of Christmas, I believe that it is impossible to do so without looking at **the real gift of Christmas**. You see the real gift of Christmas was wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger. Isaiah reminds us of this precious promise of the real gift of Christmas. "*For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*" **Isaiah 9:6**

During the time of Jesus, Israel had a burning desire for the Messiah to come - BUT:

- They were expecting a great warrior who would free them from their enemies.
- They were expecting a great leader like David who would lead them into times of great prosperity. Israel had been a conquered nation for hundreds of years. It seemed that they moved from one enemy occupation to the next and they wanted to be free from enemy control.
- Israel had believed that the Messiah would also bring great spiritual riches. They believed that the Messiah would come straight from God with supernatural power and authority.
- Israel had believed that the Messiah would be a great military leader who would bring the world to peace that would never end.

These were the characteristics Israel expected to find in the Messiah when he came. The problem was that they were looking for the Messiah to do everything at once – just as they expected. Jesus fulfilled these expectations in ways they could not even imagine or expect. The gift that was given and the way it was given turned out far better than what they had expected or anticipated.

- **Wonderful Counselor:** Israel believed that the Messiah would have the wisdom of God. Jesus was God's appointed leader to help the people find their way into a right relationship with Him. Jesus was the divine guide to show us the way to heaven.
- **Mighty God:** Jesus didn't just have the power of God behind Him, but Jesus was God Incarnate - in flesh. He was the perfect promise of God wrapped in human flesh and lived among us. The

truth is my brothers and sisters - that we have been given the greatest, most costly gift of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

- **Everlasting Father:** The people of Israel used the term father to show the care that sustains God's children. They thought the Messiah was to be a person who would not only possess the wisdom and power of God but also the great care of God for His people.
- **Prince of Peace:** Jesus brings a different kind of peace than what Israel expected. Jesus offers a deep spiritual peace that surpasses our ability to understand.

I believe, with all my heart that every person has the real desire to receive this most costly gift that God has given – HIMSELF, but they just won't accept it – they won't accept Him.

Israel's hope was that the Messiah would come and restore the kingdom of David. However, Jesus came to this earth not to restore David's earthly kingdom but instead to establish a spiritual, heavenly kingdom. The Messiah would come from God and the hope was that God would send His great king. Emmanuel was not a title or some position but was instead a description of what God was going to do through Jesus. Emmanuel literally means "*God with us*" and Jesus came to bridge the gap that sin had created between the Creator and His creation.

God has met us on our level by bringing His presence into the world in a whole new way. Throughout the Old Testament we see the presence of God:

- a burning bush,
- a prophetic vision,
- a pillar of cloud,
- a fire from heaven

But this is something far different. God was coming to his people through the womb of a virgin – as gift to humanity. The God of the universe would experience life as a human being, seeing things through human eyes. Jesus heard things through human ears, tasted food through a human mouth. Stop and think about it for just a moment. Jesus experienced life on our level. Not only does He understand the life of a human but He also knows the reality of human suffering and pain.

- Jesus knows what it is like to lose a loved one.
- Jesus knows what it is like to be betrayed.
- Jesus knows what it is like to have physical pain.

Emmanuel means that we have a God who understands what our life is like - because he has been through the realities of life.

We have been given a most precious gift: "*a child has been born, a Son has been given.*" Jesus makes an incredible offer to each of us and it is one that you cannot afford to miss. He willingly went to the cross and died for your sin and accepted the punishment that you deserved; all so that you can gain an eternal life. He then offers you something more as well: He offers the opportunity to become a member of the family of God. He offers you the opportunity to share in the blessings of God's personal family.

But - this gift from God must be accepted and received into your life for it to make an impact. Jesus cannot make you a part of the family of God until you accept the gift that God has so graciously offered to you. He will not force Himself on you.

Don't settle for something less than God's greatest gift. Are you ready for the real gift of Christmas to flow into your life? This Christmas, I pray that you will meet Him in a new and deeper way. A Son HAS been given – for you!