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December 24, 2023

The Cost of Christmas

Philippians 2:5-8

Prayer: Father, again, this is just a time to celebrate gifts and what an incredible gift we are celebrating this morning. I just thank you for your Son, I thank you for the incarnation, I thank you for just the depths of the gift that we are going to explore this morning. So I pray we would have the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would guide us, direct us, open up our eyes and our ears and our hearts and our minds so that this may be of permanent value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, just last week we spoke about the fact that Christmas can be summed up in really just one word, and that word is glory. Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King. And we asked the question last week if glory seeking is wrong for human beings, then why, why is it right for God? We answered that question three different ways. We said that God is determined to pursue his glory through us because, number one, glory is an accurate description of the reality of God. Glory just describes who God is. Number two, glory is an appropriate response to the reality of God. It's right

and it's fitting that we glorify God. And third, glory is a gift from God to us. Christmas is a celebration of the highest expression of that gift from God to us. It's the reason why we proclaim glory to the newborn King.

The incarnation, God becoming flesh is the greatest gift ever given. So how could I say that? How do we determine the value of a gift? Well, it lies not so much in its cost but more in its costliness. If I gave my wife a ten-carat diamond for Christmas, it may well be costly but if I just happened to own a chain of jewelry stores and at the last minute I just grabbed that diamond off the shelf, then in reality that cost to me was minimal and so is the real value of that gift. Christmas is a celebration of the greatest gift that was ever given, and one of the reasons why is because it was one of the costliest gifts ever given -- in fact, the costliest gift ever given. That's the miracle that we celebrate at Christmas. And in order to understand the value, we have to understand just what it cost God to become one of us.

And so this morning I want to examine the incarnation of God as the gift of the greatest value because it was the gift of the highest cost, and we want to examine this gift first from its paucity, then its perception and finally its permanence.

Some say, what do you mean by paucity? The dictionary defines paucity as the presence of something only in small quantities or amounts; scarcity. So far this winter we have seen a paucity of snow; for some that's a blessing, for others it's not. When God made his appearance here on earth, he experienced the paucity of much of what he had previously owned and displayed from eternity past. We find that in *2 Corinthians 8:9*. It says: *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*

Well, there's so much that Jesus impoverished himself of by emptying him so that he could interact with us fellow human beings. And we experience that paucity of what he was capable of expressing and we experience it for one very profound reason, and that is as God, he had the capacity to overwhelm to the point of death itself anyone he had contact with. We can barely comprehend the energy that God himself had to extend in order to truncate, to compromise, to compress and incapsulate the glory that he had that would have made his full exposure to humanity something that would have been absolutely deadly.

We know that Moses was dearly beloved by God to the point that *Exodus 33* says: *Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face,*

as a man speaks to his friend. We also know that at one point Moses, literally this friend of God, he asks God to fully reveal himself, not this truncated version that he received, and God refuses. And he refuses telling Moses: *"You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."* We find that response jarring. We find it jarring because I don't think we begin to comprehend the difference between God and man. You see, God is perfectly holy and mankind is not. And that difference is now so profound that the full revelation of God to man is now absolutely fatal. In order for Jesus to move and live amongst us, he had to empty himself of much of his glory because to do otherwise would literally have killed us.

And we have little reminders of that fact sprinkled through scripture. One such reminder was the transfiguration. Shortly before his crucifixion Jesus, he takes Peter, James and John up on the mountain. He there begins to assume some of that glory that had belonged to him before the earth had even been created. We pick up on that in *Matthew 17*. It says: *After six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.*

Well, if you've been here we've been studying the book of Revelation for the last year, you might notice how similar that language is to the language that describes Jesus in his glory in heaven itself. There Revelation describes it this way. It says: *And in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.*

So what we have here, Peter, James, and John, they're up on the mountain, they start to get a glimpse of the glory that Jesus had but only a glimpse, because I believe a full dose would have resulted in three dead disciples. And as it was, this truncated version of the glory of Jesus left Peter babbling incoherently.

Let me just read to you the account. Again, it says: *And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." For he did not know*

what to say, for they were terrified.

Peter just starts babbling, and he's babbling because they're literally terrified, and terror is a right and fitting response to coming that close to who Jesus actually is. I mean it's a response that has disappeared completely from the our culture, I mean, as God puts it in *Romans 3:18* -- he's speaking of us -- he says: "*There is no fear of God before their eyes.*" And so the gift that Christmas is celebrating is God's willingness to strip himself of so much that would produce genuine terror, so that he could become as fully human as he was fully God.

And *Philippians* tells us a number of the ways that Jesus impoverished himself in order to become one of us. You're all familiar with this scripture, it's *Philippians 2:5*. It says: *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

So we want to look at that passage to just get some of what it cost Jesus -- what it cost God to incarnate as Jesus. And so what it

says is that Jesus first from eternity past was in the form of God. And what that means is that he enjoyed all of the honor, power, dominion and glory that God the Father had as a member of the trinity. And that's the form of God that Jesus emptied himself of and that was the form that he did, that he emptied himself of in order to enter into humanity.

If you remember Jesus at the end of his ministry he's praying his high priestly prayer, and in that high priestly prayer he's reflecting on the glory that used to be his that he had given up in order to become human like us. And so he prays to his Father. He says, *"Father, I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed."*

Well, just what was that glory that Jesus had before this world even existed? Well, we get a little taste of that in a dialogue that takes place when God, after listening to 30-odd chapters of his and his companions' complaint, he tells Job that it's now time for him to answer a few questions from God. This is what God says to Job. He says: *"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements -- surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon*

it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"

Here's God talking about what Jesus was doing before the world even existed. And we know that the very same one who did the creating itself was the second person of the trinity, the Son also known as the word who became flesh, who became Jesus of Nazareth at Christmas because John's gospel tells us. *John 1:1* says: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

So what he's saying here is that at creation Jesus' power and creative might is so evident, it's so obvious that all the sons of God are shouting for joy, and "sons of God" is a reference to angels. In fact it probably even included Lucifer who hadn't yet fallen. And here this picture is God the Son is interrogating Job, and he's telling him when I created the world, the stars and the universe and everything in it, all of heaven itself was shouting for joy. So it was Jesus who was the creative arm of the trinity that put solid substance to the command of God to create life in all of its forms and substance.

Now we've said it before, you can put matter and energy on opposite sides of an equation because as we've seen with nuclear war, matter can become energy, energy can become matter. And the question is what kind of energy, what kind of energy did Jesus possess to be able to turn that energy itself into all the matter that exists in the universe, from exploding super novas all the way down to microscopic bacteria? I mean, all of its matter came into being through the energy of its creator, the word who became flesh, Jesus of Nazareth.

So understand, this is who we're talking about when we refer to Jesus sitting hot and sweaty and tired outside of a well in the Town of Sychar just waiting for a drink of water. It's all part of the costliness of the gift of incarnation. You see, only by embracing the paucity, the impoverishment that Jesus underwent to become one of us could he identify with us as our high priest. And secondly, Philipians says Jesus didn't count equality with his God as something that he needed to cling to, something to hold on to. I mean, understand, this wasn't just a binary choice between the spirit and flesh that Jesus had to make. This was a choice between honor and dishonor, glory and disgrace, dominion and servanthood, power or weakness. And yet Jesus refused to hang on to everything that he had to embrace nothing he should've wanted.

Again, consider, the same power that spoke the sun into being, picture that power now so incredibly drained that Jesus is on a boat and he's fast asleep as the boat's in the middle of a squall because he's so absolutely drained and exhausted.

Thirdly, it says: *He emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.* Understand, Jesus was fully divine when he took on himself a perfect human nature. And he didn't have the same privileges like Adam once had who for a time was flawless and perfect. It was now experiencing a life that Adam had cursed by his disobedience. I think it's a mistake to treat Adam as, oh, he simply ate a piece of food that he wasn't supposed to. That's not the case at all. It was Adam who threw his lot in with the serpent and with Eve against the very God who had given him life. Jesus as perfect God willingly inherited a nature suffering the effects of Adam's fall.

So Jesus would experience everything that the curse had placed on humanity. I mean, from the physical aspects of it like hunger and thirst and sickness and exhaustion to the mental aspects like fear and betrayal and abandonment and disgrace. All the brokenness of humanity Jesus willingly embraced in spite of the fact that all he had ever known before was altogether lovely and perfect. What he found as a human was anything but.

Mark 6 says: *And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household."* I mean, not only did his community reject him but his own family thought he was crazy.

And fourth, it says: *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient.* You have to understand, Jesus not only took on human form but the scripture says *he humbled himself by becoming obedient.* Someone might ask, well, how do you become obedient? I mean, isn't that describing a process that moves from disobedience to obedience? And if Jesus is perfect, how could he have ever been even the slightest bit disobedient? We also have the scripture in *Hebrews 5* that says: *Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.*

Well again, it says *Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered.* How do you learn something without progressively getting better at it? And if you become progressively better at it, then

at one time you were progressively worse at it; and if you were worse at it, isn't that some kind of sin that a perfect Jesus should not have had? Just how does this learning obedience work? What it means is this: It means not only did Jesus leave all the glory and perfection of heaven itself to become human by bearing all of the effects of the fallen nature of Adam, it says he also went through the process of having to obey not the simple, easy things, but things that cause real suffering.

I mean, just think about yourself, think about your own experiences, I mean, your obedience is not really tested until the thing that you have to obey becomes difficult. If your mom says, "Here's your dessert; eat it up," you've got no problem at all obeying that. It's when your mom says, "Here's your vegetables, here's your liver" or here's something that you absolutely hate, and then says, "Eat them up," then it starts to become a problem. You see, a child has no problem being obedient when obedience fits in with his desires. It's only when obedience directly conflicts with those desires that it becomes a challenge, and that's why Jesus learned obedience through suffering.

And we even see a circumstance like that occurring in the life of young Jesus. If you remember when Jesus was a young adolescent he was accidentally left by his parents during a Passover celebration.

They were separated because they were in a caravan and Mary thought that he was with Joseph, Joseph thought that he was with Mary, and they were both mistaken and in a panic they returned, they come back and they find him, he's in the temple and he's wowing the Jewish authorities. So here's Jesus at age 12 or 13 and he's blowing the Jewish authorities away. For certain, they had never before seen a boy like Jesus because never in the history of humankind has there ever been a boy like Jesus. I mean in all likelihood he could have started some kind of worldwide ministry right then and there in Jerusalem at the temple. But that was far from his parents' wishes and they wanted him to obey their desires to have him return to this little obscure town of Nazareth where he would spend years and years as a carpenter's apprentice instead of bursting on the scene as a child genius.

Luke tells us how Jesus learned obedience by practically experiencing it. He says: *And he went down with them -- that's his parents -- and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.*

See, that little bit of heart obedience, that's the type of thing that Jesus learned by suffering. Increased in wisdom and he

increased in stature by physically going through difficult things while in the flesh on earth. And the pinnacle of that learned obedience came in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus said to his Father: *"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."*

See, extreme suffering had produced nothing but extreme obedience, and obedience never became more extreme than at the final impoverishment Jesus underwent and that was death on a cross. It says: *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

And that, too, we find in the Christmas story. We all know the Christmas story refers to this idea of the gifts of the Magi, although they weren't there at Christmas eve or Christmas day, it was likely years later. We all know that these wise men brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And we know that gold represents kingship and frankincense represents the spirit, it represents prayer; and both of those would be appropriate gifts to give to a child. But myrrh, myrrh is in a different category. Myrrh was a precious spice that was used primarily for burial. It was an embalming spice. In fact after Jesus is crucified Nicodemus shows up in John's gospel and he's there to take care of Jesus' body, and what does he bring? Says right here in *John 19*:

Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight.

Myrrh was one of the gifts that the wise men brought. So why would you present an embalming spice as a gift to a newborn baby? I mean, what did that say to Mary and Joseph? I mean, if the primary reason why this baby had entered into flesh was not to be a political leader or a teacher or example but instead to be a perfect sacrifice who had come to earth for one reason only and that was to die for the sins of his sheep, then that gift would become perfectly appropriate.

See, the paucity that Jesus embraced according to this one verse in Philipians, it included giving up the form of God himself, regarding it as something that he would not cling to, then taking on the form of a servant by taking on every aspect of our fallen nature while growing in obedience even to the point of dying on a cross. That's four different levels of impoverishment, none of which we can even begin fully to grasp.

But secondly, Christmas is also the story of Jesus' impoverishment with regards to the perception that he was received with. See, everything about Jesus' existence in heaven pointed to the

magnificence of his glory. Everything about his existence on earth pointed to the perception of him as anything but glorious, including the very body that he chose to enter flesh in. I mean, you would think the King of the universe, the one who's been worshiped for all eternity by all of the sentient universe would come to earth in a body appropriate to that station but you'd be mistaken.

We're told by the prophet Isaiah that even the body that Jesus came into flesh with was one considered to be absolutely unimpressive in every way. *Isaiah 53:2* says: *He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.* He had no physical grandeur whatsoever. He had no glory at all when it came to his perceived pedigree as well. Instead of being born of royalty he was born of peasants who had no social standing whatsoever. And any shred of standing they might have had even amongst their peers was taken away by the fact that Mary became pregnant while betrothed. She was the equivalent of an unwed mother. And that idea that Jesus was illegitimate, it carried itself through all of Jesus' upbringing, even becoming part of the attacks on him that the Pharisees engaged in regularly. And we see that in the gospel of John.

At one point Jesus is arguing with the Pharisees who insist that

they're merely going about the father's business just checking up on what is true and what is not true and Jesus tells them, your father's actually the devil itself. And they respond by referring to something everyone around them had perceived about his status as an illegitimate child. This is what the Pharisees said to Jesus. It says: *They said to him, "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God."* What they're saying to him is, hey, our father's God. Since you were born of fornication nobody knows who your father even is.

And there's a huge point of cosmic irony in all of this. I mean, what must it have been like for Jesus to hear these pretenders to a relationship with God claim their right as sons when Jesus alone was the only Son of the true Father. I mean, the perception of Jesus as an illegitimate, uncouth, untrained peasant is something that stayed with him his entire life. It was all part of the price that he was willing to pay for this gift of Christmas.

And that gift became even more costly when we read about God himself getting slapped in the face. You see, when Jesus got hauled before the Sanhedrin just prior to his crucifixion, he gets quizzed about his teaching. This is *John 18*. It says: *The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have*

always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said." When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?"

Now this officer of the court, he struck Jesus because he perceived him as not giving enough deference to the high priest. And again, there's huge cosmic irony in all of this. The very office of high priest was established by the one who's being slapped here. The priest was supposed to serve as the intermediary between God and man. He was there to offer sacrifices to cover the sins of man. Well, that's precisely what Jesus was on earth to accomplish, but those folks around him had no clue of that. Jesus was the ultimate intermediary between God and man. He was the ultimate sacrifice to be offered in exchange for man's sins. But the perception of Jesus was nothing like that.

So here we have the ultimate high priest, Jesus himself, being slapped for showing insufficient deference to the potentially politically appointed phony high priest of Israel. Everything in this is perfectly backwards. You see, the high priest himself, the high priest at that time was a known crook who had gotten the

position through political maneuvering. So the whole office was a sham along with all of the proceedings and yet the perception that Jesus willingly accepted was that he was the offender upsetting a representative of God.

And so just picture this, we have this officer of the court, he walks up to God himself, the creator and sustainer of all life, the maker of the very nerves, blood and muscles that allows this man to move, and he slaps God right in the face. My guess is the entire spiritual universe collectively sucked its breath at that moment. Understand, this is the very same God who when he delivered the ten commandments told Moses this, he says: *"And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death.'"* It's the same God who said if you touch the mountain that I touch, you will die.

It's the very same God who struck Uzzah dead because he tried to stop the ark of the covenant in which the presence of God dwelt from falling off a cart into the mud. Understand, this was not a rebel trying to mock or assault the image of God. This wasn't some two bit court clerk slapping God in the face. This was someone who thought the mud would defile the ark, not realizing that it wasn't mud that would defile it, it was the touch of a human hand. This

was someone who got sloppy and he paid dearly for it. Uzzah treated lightly God's command about moving the ark. I mean, God had very specific instructions about moving the ark of the covenant, much of it were ignored during the move.

David was in charge, he was feeling very good about the move in spite of the fact that he ignored much of the instructions that God had given about how to move it. And we pick up on the story in *2 Samuel*. It says: *And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God. And David was angry because the LORD had broken out against Uzzah. And that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day. And David was afraid of the LORD that day.*

So it's describing a day of worship turning into a day of anger and fear because God's people had treated lightly the holiness of God. I just want you to picture this very same God is being slapped in the face by a court clerk. And when you're adding up the cost of the incarnation, you got to factor that in, God himself getting slapped in the face. See, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit equally took part in the reaction to both the slip of

that cart and the slap in the face in spite of the fact that their reactions were diametrically different.

And if you think there are two different Gods here, there's the mean God the Father of the Old Testament strikes Uzzah dead and the sweet son of God who embraces a slap in the face, you're making a huge mistake. Jesus stated it plainly. He said, "*I and the Father are one.*" And what God the Father did to Uzzah was perfectly appropriate at the time, harsh as it was. God's absolute holiness was never to be trifled with, no matter how good the intentions were. My guess is that Uzzah was ushered into the presence of God much sooner than he or anyone else had bargained for. And what God the Son did in reaction to being slapped in the face was also perfectly appropriate at that time. It says: *Jesus answered him, "If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?"* See, the same God who was perfectly holy was the same God who was also perfectly patient. And even Jesus' answer to the slap is a model of what the fruit of the Spirit self-control looks like.

Jesus' paucity of glory in his perception as a nobody are all part of his willingness to become one of us. And the perception about Jesus as an outlier peasant rebel worthy of no respect continued even after his death and resurrection. *Matthew 27* says: *The next*

day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." See, even in death Jesus' enemies couldn't give up the perception that he was a fraud, that he was an imposter, and their fears were realized not by his disciples stealing the body but by Jesus himself rising from the dead like he said he would.

So Jesus at Christmastime experiences the profound paucity of his emptying followed by the profound perception of his appearance as a fraud and an imposter. Folks can say that Jesus certainly did empty himself and certainly did give up a great deal to become human and it was certainly awful the perception that people had of him, then they can also add, but after all, it was only 33 years. I mean if Jesus is eternal then what's -- what's 33 years out of eternity?

What that perception ignores is basically two things. Number one, God relates to time in ways completely different than we do. I mean, Jesus came to earth at Christmastime to bear our sins and he

willingly went to the cross and there for six earth hours he hung there absorbing the just punishment of our sin. And one thing we do know is that Jesus' death on the cross paid the full price of an eternity in hell for every one of his sheep.

And so we ask, how can an eternity for even one be squeezed into six hours, let alone for every one of his sheep? And one thing we do know is that our perception of time itself is extraordinarily limited by our human experience. I mean, we see time in a linear fashion; we see it moment after moment after moment. God sees time in an entirely different way. And with that in mind, it's easier to see how God could create literal eternities that exist between seconds. I mean, the time spent on the cross in terms of earth hours is absolutely nothing compared to what God actually did accomplish during those six hours because we know at the end of that time, Jesus said, "*It is finished,*" meaning that the complete and full debt of sin has been paid for for every one of his sheep. And you and I will be spending all of eternity learning just what that debt consisted of and how those six earth hours actually comprised an eternity for each and every one of us.

So the cynic, he looks at Jesus' sacrifice and he says, well, 33 years on earth, six hours on a cross, that's not that great a sacrifice if Jesus is truly eternal. But secondly, folks seldom

realize that Jesus' transformation from spirit into flesh, that was eternal as well. You see, the third aspect of Jesus' impoverishment at Christmastime is its permanence. The fact that his incarnation, it wasn't for 33 years, it is forever. I mean, it would be one thing for God to temporarily empty himself, take on flesh for 33 years and then go back to the glory he once enjoyed, but Christ's love for and commitment to us was as permanent as his decision to become one of us was also permanent.

You see, some 2,000 years ago at the very first Christmas God elected to permanently take on human flesh. You know, Jesus exists right now somewhere in this universe in flesh and blood. He's got arms, he's got legs, he's got a trunk and a head and a torso just like us. God himself took on human flesh not just temporarily but forever. And also the one thing that this God in the flesh has and will forever have is holes in his hands and feet and a gash in his side.

After Jesus had risen from the dead he confronts doubting Thomas who said, unless I put his hands into the very wounds of Christ, I'm not going to believe that he rose from the dead. *John 20:27* says: *Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."* See, those scars were clearly evident on

the resurrected body of Jesus. They're a permanent part of who God the Son is.

I mean, do you realize how great the love of God for us is, that he was willing to not only assume human flesh on our behalf but to do it permanently? I mean, just think about that. Try to ponder the uniqueness of who God is, to go from a presence so awesome and so terrifying that even the mountains would quake and tremble, to a baby so helpless he couldn't even sit up or speak, to an adolescent fully coming to realize who he was as the former creator of the universe committed to learning obedience, to a perfect adult willing to go to the cross and offer up his perfect life as payment for our lives of sin, to a resurrected Christ, so willing to demonstrate his love for us that he encourages Thomas to put his hands into his very wounds, and those wounds are proof positive of his permanent love for us. God so loved the world that he took the very same form that we have and he took it eternally. I mean, for all time God is going to exist just like us.

Again, I said at the very beginning of this message, the measure of a gift is its costliness. And by that measure, Christmas is the costliest gift ever given. It cost God his glory, his majesty, dominion and power as he emptied himself of everything to reconcile God and sinners by paying the full price of our sin at the cross.

That's what the gift of Christmas is all about. And sad to say, it's a gift most people refuse to accept. It's a gift most people are not interested in at all. So I plead with you, if God is speaking to you this morning, if he's speaking to you about your need to open your arms and receive this gift, please just have a chat with me, have a chat with Tom, he'll be up here right in the front afterwards, he'd love to talk with you and pray with you, love to see you enjoy the greatest gift ever given on the most glorious day of the year. And that's why we sing hark the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King. Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for the gift of Christmas, we thank you for what you were willing to give up in order to join us in flesh. What an incredible gift, Lord. We thank you for the paucity of what you experienced, we thank you for how you incredibly loved us through that. We thank you for how permanent this change into flesh actually is and we thank you for the perception that you were willing to undergo a completely at odds with who you really were simply because you loved us. Father, we praise you and thank you for your gift, and we pray that we can share it with others and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.