

# THE GREATEST GIFT OF ALL

Can you remember the best Christmas present you ever received? When I was a child it was my Jerry Mahoney puppet. I had visions of becoming a famous ventriloquist like Paul Winchell who was Jerry's voice on his weekly TV show. As a teen I wished for (but never got) tickets to the Perry Como show so I could go and let my favorite singer hear me sing and invite me to perform on his show. As my oldest grandson once told me I "was full of myself."

As I grew older my wishes got more practical—like having a date for New Year's Eve or passing my college math class, but as I look back I struggle to remember many other things that at the time seemed so important to me to get at Christmas

My dad had the habit of shopping at the very last minute. He would go to Henry Harris on Christmas Eve and get gifts for my mom, my sisters, and me. By that time it was slim pickings and dad chose things he liked and counted on us to fit into them. Often that didn't quite work, but one year he bought me a tweed car coat I still wear today. Every time I put it on I feel dad's love.

When I was first married I explained our annual St. Nick tradition to my husband. It was something his family hadn't done and I thought he understood how it worked. On December 6 that year he presented me with an expensive watch. At first I was upset because we usually just gave small gifts. I told him that and his feelings were hurt. At first I justified my response but later came to my senses and apologized. That "not according to my rules" gift suddenly became precious to me. I cherish it still more than 20 years after his death. Each time I check the time I remember his love. Funny how time and age changes our perspective.

Now when I think about "best" gifts I recall the births of my children and the joy and marvel of cradling that new life in my arms. Watching them grow, mature, and start their own lives has been both bittersweet and fulfilling. I savor time more with them and listen again to the end of the message from my son who lives 500 miles away: "really love you, mom." That makes my heart sing.

I've also had the gift of deep honest unexpected reconciliation as my husband was dying. We talked about how hard his illness had been on both of us and tensions, misunderstandings, and even sometimes anger we had felt. We both apologized for our individual roles in causing this and we found healing and peace and deeper love.

We get so bombarded at this time of year with Black Friday and Cyber Monday sales and the seemingly never ending emails telling us all the material things that we "need" that should make our lives easier or more complete. It's hard to focus on why we celebrate Christmas at all.

I wonder if God were going to announce the coming of Jesus, would he take to the airways promoting the "best gift of all?" Would God have a Black Friday sale or send repeated text and voice messages, each one featuring another aspect of his gift and the urgency to act now? Would God have a Facebook or Twitter Account to get our attention since many of us are almost constantly looking at our phones? Sounds silly, doesn't it? How would God get our attention today? I'm guessing we'd find it not in the glare of media, but in unexpected places, much the same way it was done 2000 years ago. A baby being born to a seemingly insignificant pregnant woman perhaps living in a refugee camp or detained at our southern border just might be the one to change the world.

I love the line from the first chapter of John: "The word became flesh and pitched his tent among us." God's not leaving, but is right here among and with us. God took on flesh, I believe, to enter into the muck and messiness of our lives, to love us unconditionally even when we feel most unlovable, to rejoice with us in the up times, to walk with us when everything seems to be falling apart, and ultimately, to suffer with us and to assure us that we are not alone and death does not have the last word.

That's got to be the best gift ever!

~ Angela Anno

