

Carol Service 2020 - GIFT

I have come across some quite amazing forecasts about UK Christmas 2020:

£6 billion will be spent on advertising in the UK for this Covid Christmas.

An average British adult will fork out £476 on Christmas gifts in 2020, £37 less than the £513 average in 2019. Overall, the UK is planning to spend £24.2 billion on festive gifts this year - 10% less than the £26.9 billion spent on Christmas gifts in 2019.

One third of the sales of all books, toys and clothes are sold in the last eight weeks of the year – the majority being online this year! 150 million Christmas cards will have been sent - let alone emails, texts and WhatsApp messages!

7.5 million Christmas trees would have been decorated.

We would have bought and used enough wrapping paper to have gift wrapped the island of Guernsey!

From such numbers, it is quite amazing all that is spent, sent, said, wrapped, drunk and eaten.

At that first Christmas there were those who brought 3 gifts - wise men, Magi from the East and they gave gifts to the baby born. I want to use the letters, and idea of "GIFT" to hang 4 thoughts on this evening – doing so as we go through the Carols - to help us think about the One born there in Bethlehem - the Bible tells us Jesus is really God the Son united with our humanity and born into this world.

Given Freely.

Some people give cards or gifts because they expect, want or demand one back! It occurs in schools - where children give and expect something in return. I guess that is a swap - I'll swap you for what you give me...

Yet that is not how the first Christmas was - God gave the world His Son, who was born into the world. We had nothing we could swap with God to deserve or earn such an amazing gift. God freely gave heaven's best to us that first Christmas. He gave His one and only Son, someone who was really special to Him. Why did He do and give so much? John 3:16 tells us *"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."* He did it out of perfect love and He gave the best He had so that we could have eternal life when we trust him as our Saviour. Corrie Ten Boom wrote *"Who can add to Christmas? The perfect motive is that God so loved the world. The perfect gift is that He gave His only Son. The only requirement is to believe in Him. The reward of faith is that you shall have everlasting life."*

If something so great was freely given out of pure love, aren't we ungrateful if we do not receive such a gift and say *"Thank you"*?

Indescribable.

When we consider what we will have this Christmas we could tell of it and what it is like and why we like it. Val Doonican used to sing of his marvellous toy *"I never knew just what it was and I guess I never will. It went..."*

The gift God gave us is amazing - Paul calls it (2 Corinthians 9:15) *"God's indescribable gift"*. This is because it is so good, so amazing that he was unable to describe the benefits and blessings when that gift is personally accepted by us. The Lord Jesus is not just a baby born, but somehow God linked the Divine with the human forever and the Great Creator was confined to humanity - even a baby! Yet that One came to be the Saviour of all who trust in Him for salvation, yet the way for us to get right with God was not secured when Jesus was born, but when He died to save us.

God gave this world, because He loved it so much, not only an example, or a superhero, but the Saviour who would take horrors and suffering we cannot imagine on Himself to rescue, to save us from all the wrong that we have done, said, thought or desired; also, the consequences they deserve. It is indescribable how great the love of God is to do all that; indescribable how God did the miracle of the Son of God having a real body like ours and indescribable the cost paid for our salvation.

Future Proof.

Some gifts are the gift of the year - trouble is the New Year comes and it is out of favour, out of fashion and may be out in the bin! Some clothes are great for Christmas Day – but not for any other time! Think of the Christmas jumpers we may have had - we wear them just to please the one who gave it to us and then it may go for recycling or not come out until next Christmas!

The gift of the Son of God to be our Saviour is never out of date or fashion. He is relevant when we are a child, a young person, a young adult, a middle aged adult and also in old age too. In fact, the new and eternal life we receive when we trust him as our Saviour makes a difference to our lives here in space and time, but its biggest and most wonderful aspect is only fully realised after this life ends and we enter the realm of eternity. Then, and only then, will we realise how wonderful and amazing the gift is that God gave us when He sent His Son, because then we will never perish, but have eternal life. The future for all who believe in the Saviour born that 1st Christmas is secure - for all time and eternity and so it is future proof.

To have this gift equips us for all that life brings and when life ends - because our future is secure and guaranteed. Jesus left all

the wonders of heaven to come to earth, even to be born in a cowshed, a stable, so that we, who deserve nothing from God but His holy anger and punishment, we could know His love, have a place in His home in heaven that is kept safe and secure for us.

We need to see something of our response for this gift:

Thankfulness.

Hopefully our children, grandchildren, relatives and friends will say "*Thank you*" after we give them a gift. We should say the same. Sometimes "*Thank you*" can be said in such a way as to convey the idea that we didn't mean it!

What about God giving us freely the indescribable gift which secures our eternal hope, security, destiny and peace; that which gives us fullness of life now... and eternal life? Do we receive it with an amazed thankfulness? Are we staggered that this great God should give us the best He had so that we can become His children and have a home in heaven?

Angels could not contain their joy and they praised God "*Glory to God in the highest*", but this Saviour, who was born in the city of David, was not for them, but for people like you and me. Shouldn't we receive this gift with awe, wonder and a sense of praise and thankfulness to God who gives us so much and has provided us this marvellous salvation?

I pray we all would know the wonder of having received the gift of the Saviour and the salvation He brings and we'd be those who live grateful, thankful lives not just at Christmas but the whole year through, and for each and every year.