

Michael J. Mathey  
Christmas Day  
December 25, 2025  
Text: John 1:1 – 18  
Title: A Christmas Gift Card

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given! Alleluia. For to you is born today a Savior! Alleluia. Alleluia.

What should a Christmas sermon be? Over the years, I've answered that question in a variety of ways, and I've heard it answered in a variety of ways by other preachers. But I've got to say that I haven't always been satisfied with the sermons these various answers produced over the years. Trying to recall them over the past few weeks as I've prepared for this morning, ghosts of Christmas sermons past, I realize that far too many were trying to tell the hearer how to have a good, right, faithful, meaningful, satisfying, true Christmas. Sermons like that are okay, but also kind of like taping the owner's manual to the top of your gift. Then insisting that you have to read the manual—including all of the warnings about the potential dangers—before you even get to open the gift itself.

No, it seems to me that a Christmas sermon should itself be a gift. But that's not quite right either. As good and beautiful and precious as the Good News proclaimed this morning is to us, the Christmas sermon should not give you the impression that this is it; that this sermon is the whole gift of Christmas; that this is all you're going to get this year.

What, then, should the sermon be on Christmas Day? It should be like a gift card! Not the 'couldn't think of anything to get you,' buy it, use it once, and throw it away, plastic kind of gift card, but the actual card that comes with a gift and tells you who is giving the gift and who is receiving the gift. The card that I was taught you always had to open first before you got to see

what was inside the package. That's it! A gift card. This isn't the kind of card that gets scribbled out quickly so I can check one more thing off my holiday list. I'm thinking of the kind of gift card that shows just how much thought and time has gone into the gift. They're beautiful in and of themselves, but in a way that only adds more beauty and joy to the rest of the gift that still waits to be opened. I'm thinking of the kind of gift card you add when you know this may not be exactly what the person was expecting, so you want to let them know what you were thinking when you chose this gift just for them. So here it is: Here Is a Christmas Gift Card just for You.

I know you might be thinking that you get the same thing here every year, but I want you to know that a lot of thought has gone into the gift you're about to receive and that it's not nearly as tired and trite and thoughtless as you might be tempted to think. Quite the contrary. The selection of this very special gift for you began when there was no "when" yet, in a time before time was even created:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

(v 1) Maybe I've already said too much and given it away. Because yes, your gift is a word, but it's no cliché. It's *the Word* before all words. It's the Word that stood face-to-face with God, the Word that saw eye-to-eye with God, the Word himself was God. "How can a word be a gift?" you might ask.

What gift, I ask you in return, is not a word? What gift is not an expression, a solid, three-dimensional speaking out of love or admiration or hope or joy? Why do all the advertisers say, 'Give the gift that says...' if gifts are not, more than anything else, words? Don't doubt it for a moment. The Giver of every good and perfect gift knows how to choose the perfect gift, and He knows very well how to choose the perfect gift for you. "[The Word] was in the

beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” (vv 2–3)

Please pay close attention so you’ll know what it is you’re receiving in this gift. If you had within your grasp the agent through which all things came into being, the Aladdin’s lamp of all Aladdin’s lamps, the goldenest goose in the universe, a magic wand of wonder, if you could simply speak into existence anything you could imagine, what would you make, what would you give to that person you love the most? What would then be the perfect gift for you? “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (vv 4–5)

I’m not trying to confuse you with riddles here. Well, maybe just a little because how can a word be life and light? How can one gift be all three? Have just a little more patience, and you’ll see!

“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” (vv 9–11)

You’ll have noticed by now that I haven’t included a “gift receipt.” Sadly, there have been those to whom this same precious gift has been given who then refused to accept it. But there’s no possibility of return here, even less possibility of exchange. This gift is for all, just as it is for you, specially chosen just for you. To paraphrase the wisdom of a man named G. K. Chesterton: It’s not that many who have opened the gift have then been disappointed in it; rather, being disappointed that this was all they should be receiving, they left it unopened. Can you believe it? Unopened. Unrecognized. Unknown. Unwelcomed. Unloved. Unimaginable tragedy! Please, please, finish reading this gift card, and then take the time to open your gift carefully.

Take the time to get to know all that this gift contains, all that it brings to you. Please don't set it aside with a quick and heartless "It's just what I've always wanted." Don't tuck it away in some corner of the closet still in its wrappings. Open it now, and see what it can do.

"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth...For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." (vv 12–14, 16–18)

Would I be showing poor taste if I included reviews of the gift you've yet to open? I hope it won't diminish either your anticipation or your joy if I tell you here that those who have already received this gift have found in it no less than new birth.

I admit it, this gift card has grown long, and I fear I've already said too much and given it away. I hope, though, that, filled with the true and Holy Spirit of Christmas, you aren't thinking, "I knew it. It's what I get every year!" Instead, I hope your fingers are twitching with excitement as you say to yourself, "Yes! It's the only gift I ever want, and it's my gift again this year!" Now, set the card aside and open the gift again, but know it as never before! Receive gift upon gift from the fullness of God himself. He is giving you grace and truth, life and light, all is yours in the gift your Father has prepared and given, from before time, for all of time, for this year and every moment still to come! And this gift has a name, and His name is Jesus Christ. He who has been with God since the beginning, who died on the cross for you and rose from the dead, He is

with you now and forever. Hear again – and hear truly – the gift of this Word in promise and proclamation, in hymn and carol. Given for you! This day! A Savior! Jesus Christ. Know Him and in Him know your Father, for Christ alone is the way to know the Father. He alone is the Word from above, the Word in the beginning, the Word forever, the Word of life forever, the true and gracious Word, that makes known to you the love of your Father.

What was on your wish list this year? No, not the one you shared with family and friends. The list hidden deep within your heart, the one you dared not show a soul, the one you barely dared peek at yourself. What was on that list? Hope? It's right here. The joy you lost so many years ago? It's right here. Freedom from the oppression of care and worry and doubt and hopelessness and emptiness? It's right here. New birth? New identity? The chance to start over from the beginning? A life that will have meaning and purpose? A new life that will never end? It's right here.

It's all right here in this Word that comes from the Father, filled with grace and truth. It's here in the Word that is this Christmas feast already prepared and waiting for you to come, take, eat, and drink. It's in the Word that fills the hearts of the brothers and sisters who surround you here and in the hearts of the loved ones who will gather around tree and table, by firelight and candlelight, singing and praying, laughing and playing, to celebrate this gift with you tonight and in the days to come. It's here in the Word that the darkness can never master. It's here in the Word that never fails. And now may the gift of this Word wrap *you* up in the peace and security of your Father's embrace. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.