

REGALOS REGALOS!
Christmas Eve –December 24, 2013 –Matthew 2: 1-12
The Church of the Covenant

The other year I wore my nice leather, black preacher shoes to see the Live Nativity Scene we have on the Sunday before Christmas. The animals were all there from the petting zoo. The children had gathered in their delight. The Holy Family looked a lot like the kids in the youth group, which indeed they were. The live baby Jesus we had recruited cried a lot. The ground was wet and squishy. It was a bit messy. It could have gotten a lot messier, if you know what I mean. And I managed to get mud all over my nice black preacher shoes. Same this year, too. You know, maybe going to the manger in Bethlehem to find the Christ Child involves a little messiness also. Maybe our manger scenes and the way we envision Christmas is a little too pretty, too pristine. Maybe the Wise Men got their shoes muddy, maybe they even got their knees dirty, as they knelt in Bethlehem to worship the new born King.

The Baby Jesus was born in a manger, in an animal feeding trough after all!

Many years ago in another church we collected Christmas gifts for the Spanish-speaking new residents of that area, the families who had children enrolled in our entirely Spanish-speaking Network Preschool. Every year the church would gather gifts and every year one or two people would distribute the gifts to the families. You could write a check. Or you could go and buy the gifts yourself and wrap them. But you never actually had the opportunity to see and meet the families. Regalos-regalos, the name of this sermon, in Spanish, by the way, means “gifts-gifts!” I tended to write a check. But one year I felt that was not enough. So I encouraged our mission committee to go and to deliver the gifts themselves to the families. And not asking someone to do something that I was unwilling to do myself, I volunteered to deliver a gift to a family. Dashing through the snow, I was grumbling all the way, in my one horse open shay, and I kept beating myself up, as in, “Why did I agree to do this? I have no time. I am way too busy with Christmas to deliver “regalos” to this family. What was I thinking?”

So I pick up the gift and I get the address and I think, “O no, its in that old rundown dimly lit apartment complex where there is a lot of crime and I won’t know my way around and it will be impossible to find it and I will waste a lot of time at a time when I have no time to waste. But I figured if the Wise Men could travel from Ur of Chaldea and find the Baby Jesus, at least Stu could find one small apartment in Arlington, VA. “God, please provide a star to show me the way.” So I “traverse afar” and am slowly driving through the section of this large, poorly marked apartment complex, still wondering how I am going to find this family, when I spy up in a lighted window a little head of a little child, jumping up and down. Now you see his face; then you don’t. Now you see his face; now you don’t. And this “Wise Man” sort of goes, “Duh, that must be it.” He’s shouting something, but I cannot hear it quite yet.

So I make my way up the steps with my bag of three gifts, not exactly gold and Frankincense and myrrh, if you know what I mean --one gift for the little boy, one for his Mother and one for his Father. And I come to the apartment door where I hear a little voice shouting, “Regalos! Regalos! Regalos!” “Gifts! Gifts! Gifts!” I ring the doorbell and am welcomed in by the parents. I see a very small apartment where it appears there are at least three families living, perhaps 10 or more people in a small one bedroom apartment. There is no furniture in the living room or small kitchen; there are only a couple of old mattresses on the floor in the bedroom. And there in the one corner of the living room is the only thing in the room –a small, two foot plastic Christmas Tree, on a cardboard box, on which is draped a piece of fabric. It is the saddest Charlie Brown Christmas trees ever, sans light, sans ornament. The little boy is still jumping up and down shouting out, “Regalos, regalos!” There are no other gifts under the

sad little Christmas Tree; I realize that my three sad little gifts are the only ones these families will have that Christmas. *How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift was given...*

You know, those original Wise Men really weren't too smart. They had brought their gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh expecting to find a newborn King. In point of fact, if you follow the story carefully, they show up first at Herod's palace, assuming logically, that they would find the newborn King in a palace. They are stupid Wise Men. Where they thought they were going to find the birth of the Baby Jesus was not where they actually found the birth of the Baby Jesus. They got their shoes muddy at the manger. Jesus was to be born in a stable, a rude wooden manger was His throne, and his unimpressive royal family was a carpenter and a maiden, not King Herod and his queen. They brought the wrong gifts. Probably, Mary would have appreciated Pampers, Baby Powder and Baby Wipes more than gold and frankincense and myrrh. *How foolishly, how foolishly we often seek to find Christmas the wrong way each year...*

You know, how sometimes you go to help and you wind up being helped? Or how you go to bless someone and come away feeling blessed instead? Well, this Wise Man, good ol' Pastor Stu, went to give a gift to that Spanish speaking family, feeling so morally superior and all, deigning to grant some small modicum of my precious time, but instead received the greatest gift ever given –the new birth of Jesus Christ into my heart that year. "Regalos, regalos, regalos!" I had received the only gift worth giving or receiving at Christmas –the Baby Jesus Himself.

I love the poem by Christina Rossetti, "In the Bleak Midwinter" the last line of which states this:

What can I give Him poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.

If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part.

Yet what can I give Him?

Give him my heart.

It is good to give your heart to Jesus this Christmas. But I think it is far, far better thing to give Jesus your LIFE tonight. I think it is far, far better to promise Him that you will become personally involved and engaged in His world. That you would actually care enough about the birth of Jesus into our world and into our heart to go out and do an act of love in His name. Be willing to get your shoes muddy in Bethlehem. Be willing to take responsibility for the little children in the world who need those regalos that only you can give. Maybe smell some things in the manger at Bethlehem you'd rather not smell and go some places in Jesus' name you'd rather not go. Maybe, maybe then you might truly be a wise man or a wise woman. Maybe, just maybe, then you would experience the new birth of the Savior into your heart this Christmas. Maybe, just maybe, Bethlehem is a lot messier than we think it is...maybe, just maybe we have to give love to others in order to see the love we have received as a gift from God born that starry, starry night. Maybe, just maybe what God did for us in Bethlehem requires more than a few nice thoughts and a warm feeling in our heart. Maybe, just maybe, it requires our life.

As our scripture states: *"Then, opening treasures, they offered Him gifts..." (Matthew 2: 11)* If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part. Yet what can I give Him? O beloved, Give Him MY LIFE as well as my heart. Regalos! Regalos! Christmas is always about the gift God gives in Jesus; and the gift of our life HE waits to receive. Thanks be unto God for His inexpressible gift! And Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*