

## The Gift of God

by **Jon Barnes**  
**Executive of Mission Education**

As Christmas approaches, I have recently been reminded of one of our family traditions. After Christmas Eve dinner, when all the presents were passed out, we went around in a circle, opening one present at a time, so that each person could know what everyone else received. It seemed to take forever! My dad made us do this partly because he wanted to drive his children crazy. However, I also know that he did this so that we would pay attention to who had given us each gift. To watch others open gifts that we had given them. All of this was done to build relationships.

I am sure that most of us have special memories of Christmas time, but often we romanticize them. We remember perfect Christmases where everyone was happy, the food was wonderful, and there was “peace on earth and good will toward everyone.” But, if we are honest, we must admit that our lives are not like that, our world is not like that.

Jesus did not enter into a perfect world, either. Jesus came into a world where people were homeless and hungry. We still live in that world. He came into a world of empire, of the domination and subjugation of peoples; a world of war and violence; a world where there were insiders and outsiders, and where who you were and where you were from mattered. Even Jesus himself faced it when people asked, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

And where are we today? We are in a world of Michael Brown and Ferguson, of Tamir Rice and Cleveland, of Eric Garner and New York, and countless other people and places; where people and communities who are black and brown must walk differently through this life just to survive. God knows we still live in that world.

If God had waited for a perfect world to come to us incarnate, God would still be waiting. That is the miracle. Despite our failings, God chose to enter our world and our lives in an entirely new way. The gift of God is our hope in times of sorrow, light in the darkness, and comfort where there is pain. We have been given this gift to show us how to love even at times when the world seems to show us only hate.

As we celebrate this Christmas and we make new memories with family and friends, let us not take for granted the gift that God has given us. The gift of God: a gift of love, not offered because we deserve it or are good enough to receive it, not because we are naughty or nice, and definitely not because the world is perfect. A gift given simply because God loves us. “The gift of God for the people of God.”

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Jon Barnes is Executive of Mission Education for the common Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).*

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