

Every child eventually learns an important lesson on Christmas: Good things often come in small packages. Because I think we all remember the year that we scrambled to open the presents under the Christmas tree. Immediately going for the biggest box we could find. Only to discover that it contained... a sweater. Or some other equally mundane gift.

As adults, we know this lesson all too well. It's the small box that has a set of car keys in it. Or an engagement ring. Or just good old fashioned cash. Good things very often come in small packages. In fact, often the very best things come in the smallest of packages.

This was a lesson that ancient Israel never seemed to figure out. They heard Isaiah's prophecy of a Wonderful Counselor, a Mighty God, an Everlasting Father, a Prince of Peace and they immediately went rushing for the biggest, shiniest box they could find. They ignored the fact that Moses was an outcast with a speech impediment. Or that David was the youngest, most insignificant son of Jesse. Or any number of examples from Israel's history of great men coming from humble beginnings.

No, they were like children on Christmas morning, searching for the biggest box under the tree. A great warrior to sit on David's throne. A man of political power and military might and worldly splendor. A man who was nothing like Jesus.

Who came to his people as a baby. Born to a common woman. Laid in a manger. Wrapped in swaddling cloths. There is nothing smaller, weaker, or more unimpressive than that. And yet, hidden in that tiny package was the Son of God incarnate.

That's the confession of the Church on Christmas Day. Not that God merely sent help to His people, but that God Himself came to His people. Not that He offered a word about salvation, but that He delivered salvation in the flesh. Not that He partially revealed Himself, but that He placed the fullness of His saving power into the arms of Mary.

That's the thing about Christ's incarnation. It may look small, but it really is a tremendously great gift. The very best gift we could receive. What's inside this tiny package is so much greater than we could possibly conceive.

Through this little baby, God has done exactly what he promised in our passage from Isaiah: *"The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God."* God's arm is revealed. God's power is made visible. God's salvation is placed on display for the whole world to see.

Or take the words from our Epistle reading. The child born at Christmas is *"the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature."* Not a copy. Not a shadow. Not a partial likeness. The exact imprint. If you want to know what God is like – His heart, His will, His mercy, His determination to save – you do not look behind the manger for something greater. You look into it.

That baby is not God's representative. He is God Himself in the flesh. God doesn't holding anything back. Everything He is, He gives. Everything He has, He brings. The exact imprint of God lies in that feeding trough.

And Hebrews presses the point further. This child is not only God revealed. He does what only God can do. *"After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."*

That baby is born with a mission already underway. From crib to cross to throne, this child carries out the work no one else could do. The one who cannot yet speak is already the one who will speak forgiveness. The one who must be carried by his mother is the one who will carry her sins and the sins of the whole world.

John's Gospel takes us even deeper into this mystery. *"In the beginning was the Word."* Before Bethlehem. Before creation. Before time itself. *"The Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made."*

That baby in the manger is the Creator. The hands that formed Adam now curl into tiny fists. The voice that said, *"Let there be light,"* now cries in the night. The one through whom all things came into being now enters His own creation as one of us.

*"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."* Not appeared as flesh. Not pretended to be human. Became flesh. Took on our nature. Took on our weakness. Took on our mortality. In that small package is the entire Word of God. Not just spoken to us, but spoken as one of us.

And what did that Word bring with Him? *"From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace."* Not a limited supply. God doesn't ration his mercy. The fullness of God's grace is contained in this child. Every promise. Every act of forgiveness. Every gift of life and salvation flows from Him.

Now go back to Isaiah. What does this mean for us? *"The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations."* God's infinite salvation isn't limited to one people or one place. It's not tribal. *"All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God."*

That baby carries the saving power of God for the entire world. The arm of the Lord is revealed not in brute force, but in sacrificial love. Not in domination, but in humility. Not in destruction, but in incarnation.

God saves by becoming small. God conquers by submitting. God reigns by serving. The world looks for power in size, strength, and spectacle. A huge box sitting under the Christmas tree. But God hides His power in a manger. So that sinners are not terrified away, but drawn near. So that dirty shepherds and Gentile foreigners feel welcome bowing down to worship him.

It's a reality that can be difficult for our sinful minds to accept. Because we still often assume that if God is going to work, He will do it in obvious ways. Through strength, success, splendor, and control. But Christmas tells us otherwise. God works through the ordinary. Through the hidden. Through means that seem far too small to carry such weight.

A baby. A cross. Bread and wine. Water and the Word. An ordinary small-town pastor proclaiming, "I forgive you." Good things come in small packages because God delights in delivering His gifts where this dark, sinful world would never think to look for them.

And that means Christmas is not only something to admire, but something to trust. The child in the manger is enough. Enough wisdom for your confusion. Enough grace for your guilt. Enough hope for your despair. Enough life for your death. You don't need to look beyond Him for something greater, because there is nothing greater.

Hebrews says that this same child *"upholds the universe by the word of his power."* Even now. Even today. The one who once lay in Mary's arms holds you in His arms. The one who entered the world in humility now reigns in glory, and He reigns for you.

So today, the Church joins Isaiah in climbing to the top of the mountain and announcing good news. Peace has come. Salvation has been revealed. God reigns. And He reigns not from a distance, but from within our flesh and blood.

We join John in confessing that the Word has become flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. We join Hebrews in proclaiming that the child of Christmas is the exact imprint of God, the Creator of all things, and the Savior who has made purification for sins.

Today, we lift up our voices like watchmen on the walls and sing for joy. For the smallest package ever given contained the greatest gift imaginable. Joy, joy, for Christ is born, the babe, the son of Mary. Amen.