

Christmas Wrapping



And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:7

Everyone loves gifts, especially those colorfully wrapped and tied with creative ribbons and bows. We often judge a gift by its wrapping, and even the gift giver! If it is wrapped with expensive paper and ribbons, we anticipate an expensive gift. And extravagant wrapping suggests the generous gift giver cares enough to wrap their precious gift in like manner. Gift wrapping has become an art and business as many stores offer special services so buyers can purchase wrapping as elegant as their gifts. Children are often less appreciative of gift wrapping as it delays access to the gift it adorns, while some adults carefully preserve gift wrapping ostensibly to use again! Most of us quickly tear off and discard the wrapping to admire the gift and thank the gift giver.

The first Christmas wrapping was a long linen cloth called swaddling clothes, used to bind babies in ancient times. Swaddling clothes sound special because we envision that they are like the soft fleece blankets in which we wrap our new born babies. Imagine the baby Jesus born in a stable, wrapped in common linen cloth, and placed in a livestock feeding trough. Though Jesus was wrapped in common cloth and lay in a manger, the angels knew to herald His arrival as the Son of God. Shepherds seeing this heavenly host knew instantly to worship the new born Savior, though they found him in crude surroundings. Wise men saw the prophetic star (www.bethlehemstar.net) and knew to bring gifts of great value for the prophesied King of kings. This linen wrapped child was the most precious gift of all time... the gift of salvation to the whole world. *“We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and He in God.”* John 4:14-15

God knew best how to wrap His gift of grace and announce His coming, for great danger confronted Mary and Joseph and their new born. Warned in a dream, they journeyed to Egypt to protect the holy child from Herod’s maniacal fear of a rival king.

A poor Jewish family, they lived in obscurity and isolation in a foreign land; when told by the Spirit that it was safe to return home, they settled in the small town of Nazareth where as a carpenter’s son the boy Jesus grew in knowledge and wisdom. Only at the appointed age of 30 did Jesus begin his public ministry when baptized by John in the River Jordan. An itinerate Rabbi, Jesus preached and performed miracles all about Galilee, growing in fame and following among the oppressed Jewish people. Yet among the ruling Pharisees He was perceived as a threat to their authority and favored position with the Roman occupiers.

Within three short years, Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of His sacrificial death as Savior of the world. During the traditional Passover celebration, He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey surrounded by rejoicing crowds. They triumphantly hailed His arrival waving palm branches in praise. Jesus was heralded the long awaited and desired Messiah! The people believed He would free them from Roman bondage and persecution. Yet the Jewish authorities could not accept this threat to their control. Following the Passover feast, they conspired to have Him condemned to death by the Romans. It happened so quickly. From being heralded as Messiah, to being reviled as a blasphemer, Jesus was condemned to the cruelest scourging and torturous, humiliating execution ever invented – crucifixion.

Upon His death, Jesus was taken hastily from the cross to be buried before the Sabbath. They cleaned His brutally bloodied and beaten body as best they could and wrapped Him in the traditional Hebrew linen burial cloth enshrouding the body from front to back. Then, they took His body and laid him in a wealthy man’s tomb. A massive stone was rolled in place stamped with a Roman seal to prevent tampering, and guarded by Roman soldiers sworn to stand their ground to the death; authorities feared His followers may perpetrate a fraud by taking the body and claiming Jesus was alive.

Nothing could have been further from their minds, however, as the disciples hid in a barricaded room fearful for their own lives. Only several women were brave enough to approach the garden tomb hoping to cover the wrapped body in burial spices, clueless as to how they may access the sealed tomb. Yet, upon their arrival, the guards were nowhere to be found, the tomb open, and the body gone! After reassurance by an angel of His resurrection, in their amazement and excitement, the women ran to the cowering disciples to share the good news. Unbelieving yet hopeful, Peter and John ran to the tomb and entered to witness for themselves that the tomb indeed was empty. While not recorded in scripture, it is possible that Peter and John gathered Jesus' burial shroud, seared with an image they could not explain, to show the other disciples that Christ had risen as the women and angels proclaimed! Later Jesus appeared to the disciples: *"Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, 'Peace be with you...as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.'"* John 20:19 – 21

Word spread quickly that He arose! Jesus appeared to many disciples before ascending to the Father, confirming fulfillment of the prophets' Messianic predictions. ([1 Corinthians 15:3-6](#)) On the road to Emmaus Jesus said, "...Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?' Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures." Luke 24:26 – 27 Jesus was who He claimed to be – Lord and Savior, the Son of God.

Today, while hotly contested, many believe that Jesus' burial cloth survived throughout the centuries and is now known as the Shroud of Turin. Decades of scientific research have revealed much about the image on the shroud indicating it could not have been created by any natural, known phenomenon. Recent research actually has recreated the face of Jesus from the 3-dimensional, negative photographic image embedded in the mysterious cloth.

(<http://www.history.com/shows/the-real-face-of-jesus/about>)

Perhaps knowing that our skeptical generation would have the technology and knowledge to unravel the mystery of Jesus' burial cloth, God preserved the shroud with its inexplicable image of a crucified man. Could it be that the

power of Jesus' resurrection energy created this lasting image? Perhaps as He resurrected from death to life, Jesus left an indelible imprint on His burial wrapping, preserved in the Shroud of Turin.



This Christmas as you colorfully and carefully wrap your gifts for those you cherish, remember that the first Christmas wrapping was a simple linen cloth. While we present gifts of earthly pleasures to our loved ones, remember He wraps us in His glorious light, His eternal salvation, and His holy righteousness. *"I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."* Isaiah 61:10

This Christmas receive His supernatural wrapping and share with others the transforming and eternal power of the first Christmas gift – Jesus, Son of God and Savior of the world!

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www.celebratingchrist.com