



## A Gift...Wrapped in Swaddling Clothes

*"...The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel (God with us)." Isaiah 7:14 "And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in 'swaddling' cloths and lying in a manger." Luke 2:10 - 12*

Christmas is a favorite time for us all to give and receive gifts. Forty five percent of consumer merchandise is sold during the Christmas season. When we buy at Christmas, we spend big dollars on clothes, electronics, jewelry and a vast array of personal items. Our intentions are generous as we seek to please our family and friends with material gifts we believe they will enjoy and appreciate. To add to the anticipation and enjoyment of giving and receiving we wrap our gifts in colorful packages and place them under a creatively decorated tanenbaum. Traditions vary but all are intended to bring joy and happiness to our Christmas celebration. But all of these gifts and their wrappings pale in the light of the greatest gift of all times, a gift wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Over two thousand years ago, Jesus was born as God's gift to all mankind. He gave His Son born of a virgin to bring life to a fallen creation, to redeem mankind from original sin, to re-establish an intimate relationship with His children whom He created in His image. Jesus fulfilled over 300 prophecies in his birth and life and death and resurrection! God's gift was carefully planned, immaculately conceived, meticulously prepared and miraculously delivered! Angels heralded His arrival. A star shone over His simple birthplace as He lay in a manger, surrounded by animals and shepherd boys. Contrasted with His humble birth, three kings of the East, astrologers by occupation sought the child born King of the Jews, bringing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. All these signs of His coming were prophesied hundreds of years before the babe in swaddling clothes arrived.

The Bible does not tell us to celebrate Jesus' birth, but rather to remember His death and resurrection -- the culmination of a perfect life of serving, healing and teaching. His 3-year ministry confirmed the reality of who He was, established His authority, prepared His Jewish followers for their mission upon His resurrection, and validated the new covenant of grace. Indeed this was the ultimate gift of the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes... grace. Jesus was the gift of grace, salvation freely given. No

strings or ribbons attached. No qualifications or requirements demanded. No exclusions or returns dictated. Grace... undeserved, unencumbered, unbelievable! This was the heart of the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes.

All one need do to receive this gift of grace, is to accept it. Simple. A gift that will last not a year, not a decade, not merely our earthly lifetime, but will last for eternity. Our relationship with Jesus is for the here and now as He resides in our hearts, and for eternity when we shall pass from this earth-bound body to eternal existence with Him in the spirit. This is truly a gift of peace, of joy, of hope. Jesus reinstated all the privileges of the original Garden-of-Eden relationship between God and Adam and Eve. Through Jesus we can commune with God -- seek His face, walk with Him, and talk with Him. This incredible gift simply accepted brings peace where there is dissention, joy where there is depression, and hope where there is despair. Grace, like the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, is a gift given in humility. With like humility, a gift simply received.

It is so easy to get wrapped up in the activity and glitter and festivity of the season that we miss the simplicity yet profoundness of the original Christmas story. As you prepare your carefully selected gifts for Christmas this year, consider the greatest gift of all. Have you received the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes -- the gift of grace? If so, take time this season to praise Him for his matchless gift and share it with another. If not, take time to consider the value of this precious gift. All the gifts ever given around the world, are merely chaff blown by the winds of time when balanced against the eternal weight of salvation by grace. Accept the priceless gift wrapped in swaddling clothes this Christmas and receive abundant and eternal peace, joy and hope.

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