

December 25, 2024

I wonder what the best Christmas present you've ever received is?

To be honest, I can't really remember this myself. I've a vague recollection that my favourite possession at university was a Christmas present from my grandparents - an all one in breakfast maker that combine a coffee machine, a toaster, a mini oven and a radio - but there's as much chance I bought it myself having seen it in one of those charity catalogues of wonder that my Nan used to bring open, the ones that have a mystifying array of devices you never knew you needed.

I find it much easier to remember the worst Christmas present I ever received. A plastic Roman centurion's outfit from an Aunt and Uncle when I was about five or six that was designed for a two or three year old. It didn't fit me. And worse. My younger brother who was two or three at the time got the exact same outfit, and of course it did fit him. So in reality he got two. I'm not sure I've ever recovered from that Christmas.

This year is the fortieth anniversary of Band Aid's 'Do They Know It's Christmas?' There are lots of controversial lyrics in the song. I had a Zimbabwean school friend who refused to sing it because of the line 'there won't be snow in Africa this Christmas', because, well, there will, or at least definitely might be. And lots does grow. And there are rivers.

Another line that I've always found trips me up is 'the greatest gift they'll get this year is life', because it makes it sound like Christmas is about the quality of gifts we get, rather than the reason we give and receive gifts at all. The more I've thought about it this year, the more it seems to accidentally hit the nail on the the head, because the gift at the heart of every celebration of Christmas, the reason we give and receive gifts, is because of the gift of life - the gift of the very author of life become flesh for us, the start of the gift of God's human life in Christ.

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people...

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Today we give and receive gifts, because we have been given the greatest gift - not just life itself, but our share in God's life, through God's sharing our life in Jesus Christ. So whether or not the gifts we get today are just what we wanted or unusuable, whether we forget them in a month's time, or even if we don't receive a single gift at all, we are all recipients of that gift that will outlast even our memories of them, the gift of God's birth as one of us in Jesus Christ - the gift of new life, and the invitation to share that gift, that new and risen life with others.

For those of us who receive Communion this morning, when we receive the Body and Blood of Christ we share in this gift afresh all over again, the greatest gift any of us will receive today or in our life, the very gift of God for us, God with us, in Christ. Amen.