

- Isaiah 52:7-10
- Hebrews 1:1-4,(5-12)
- John 1:1-14
- Psalm 98

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“Love Came Down at Christmas”

One of my favorite Christmas stories is O. Henry's short story, *The Gift of the Magi*. It captures the true meaning of Christmas in a such a nuanced and tender way. The story is set in the early part of the 20th century. A young couple, Dell and Jim, are newly married and they are very much in love. They live in a tiny furnished apartment whose rent they can barely afford on Jim's very meager salary. They have very few possessions between them. However, Jim inherited a very fine gold pocket watch from his father and grandfather. He is quite proud of it and it means a great deal to him. Dell also possesses something of great value to her. She has unusually beautiful hair that falls past her knees when she lets it down. She usually keeps it modestly pinned up on top of her head.

It is the day before Christmas. Dell has pinched and saved money all year so she can buy a special Christmas gift for Jim. She counts out her savings and it is exactly \$1.87. She is crest fallen. How will she ever be able to get a gift with so little money. Suddenly Dell rushes out the door and goes to a hair salon. For \$20 she sells her beautiful, long hair. Dell uses all the money to buy the perfect gift - a gold chain for Jim's pocket watch. Jim doesn't use the watch much because he does not have a gold chain to secure it to his pocket. Elated with the perfect gift she hurries home.

Soon Jim arrives home for dinner and his jaw drops when he sees Dell's short, cropped hair. She has never seen him look so strange – he doesn't say a word. Maybe he will think Dell is no longer pretty without her long hair. She hurriedly explains that she sold her hair so she could buy him a gift. Jim assures Dell he loves her no matter the length of her hair. He gives her a small paper package – his Christmas gift to her. Dell opens the package and sees two beautiful jeweled combs for her hair – ones she has admired in the shop window for quite some time. Dell assures Jim her hair will grow. Dell then runs and gives Jim the gold chain. Jim slowly smiles and sits down, suggesting that they put their gifts away. He explains he sold his watch to buy the combs. They both sat down to enjoy their dinner.

O. Henry explains that this young and foolish couple, who each sold what they prized most to buy a gift for the other, were actually most wise. Like the magi, the kings who come bearing precious gifts for the newborn Christ child, Jim and Dell give the most precious gift anyone can give – they gave the gift of oneself. They gave the gift of love.

This is the true meaning of Christmas – God loving the world enough to give his own son for the sake and well-being of the world and not for anything God could gain in return. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” (John 1:1) Jesus is the Word of God, God’s only begotten son. He came into the world; God loving and caring for the world so much that he took on our human nature and emptied himself into the person we know as Jesus, his son. This is the gift of Christmas. It is what love is all about, giving what we most cherish and expecting nothing in return.

No matter what you may be feeling this Christmas season, God is with you.

Be it joyful – God is in the midst of your joy.

Be it a time of bittersweet memories, God is with you in your memories, both the good and the bad.

Be it a time of hardship, misgivings or loneliness, God is with you in the loss and sadness, holding it all.

Our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, recently shared, “Someone once said, in a Christmas poem, “Love came down at Christmas.” That’s what love is. To give, and not to count the cost. To give, not for what one can get, but for what the other can receive. That’s what love is. God so loved the world that he gave.”¹ And God keeps on giving. This is the gift of grace that comes from the heart.

Give your heart this Christmas. It will be the best gift you can give.

God bless and keep you this most holy night,

Amen.

¹ Michael Curry, <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2018/12/18/presiding-bishop-michael-curry-christmas-message-2018/>, last accessed on 12/21/2018.