

There's Something About That Name©

Matthew 1:18-21

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Christmas Gifts That Won't Break – HOPE

What is one of the best Christmas gifts you've ever received? I'm talking about a present that was wrapped and under the tree – or it could have been parked outside in the driveway. As a teenager I longed to have the gift of a beautiful sports car. I had this hope of getting up on Christmas morning and my parents taking me outside, blindfolded. Then, taking off the cover for my eyes – and behold! – there was the car of my dreams.

That never happened. But I did get a lot of nice presents from my family. Ice skates one year. My first pair of high heels another year. After I was married, I received a beautiful long coat with a fur collar.

But all the gifts I ever got back then are just memory. The skates didn't work because I could not skate and they ended up in heap somewhere, I guess. The shoes wore out and the coat became worn and lost its beauty eventually.

What about you? What is one gift you remember that was a favorite? One that was a thing, not a person. Anyone want to share?

How many of you still have a favorite gift from your childhood or early adulthood? Most all of mine were so long ago I have no idea what even happened to them.

In our Advent study for this season we are thinking about Christmas gifts that do not break. With the gift of the Christ-child, we can probably name quite a few unbreakable gifts that God has given us through Jesus. But this season we are particularly looking at the gifts we have in the traditional themes of the candle lighting in the Advent Wreath: Hope, Love, Joy and Peace.

Today, we lit the very first candle – the candle of Hope. In the liturgy that Cathie and Bob led us in, we talked about the hope of Jesus' return. He promised that he would return someday and even though, in this world of science and advanced intelligence, even as unlikely as it might seem, we – who follow Christ – continue to hope for his second coming.

In Bible Study this past Wednesday night, we talked about other things we hope for. We hope for there to be an end to hatred and prejudice, an end to violence, persecution, war, poverty, addiction, homelessness. We hope for an end to sickness – like cancer, Mastocytosis, Alzheimer's disease, heart disease and strokes, among many others.

We hope for peace. We pray often for there to be peace on earth and yet ... do we see any real signs of any of those things becoming reality? Not nearly as much as we would like, right?

But we do not give up hope. We continue to hope for all these good things and we continue to pray, believing that it can happen. Why? Because God has planted that gift of hope inside our hearts and minds, into our very souls, really. Because we believe what Jesus taught – that all things are possible with God.

If we look around at one another – we see brothers and sisters in the faith, living lives that exemplify the one we follow – Jesus. We see hope in the actions of one another as we serve and love and show care, in Jesus’ name.

In fact, Jesus’ name is one that brings us hope. Matthew tells us that the angel went to Joseph, who was engaged to Mary but they were not married yet. He had just learned that Mary was expecting and he knew it was not his baby. But the angel came to him and assured him that this baby was from God. “And you are to name him *Jesus*.”

The name Jesus means *Savior; the one who saves*. The very name of Jesus gives us hope. God sends his only Son and names him Jesus because he comes to save us from ourselves – as someone said in Bible Study.

And we know that we – ourselves – are prone to sin. We easily wander away from God and we need a Savior who brings us back to him, who saves us and forgives us from our sinfulness and who transforms us into the new creation he promises we will be.

Jesus came to show us God’s love and mercy and grace. In his dying we are forgiven and in his rising from the dead, we have hope of eternal life – life after this life. The gift of Jesus – the one who saves – is the gift of salvation. Our hope is in Jesus and it is a gift that does not break. Because of Jesus’ we continue to hope for all those good things that seem impossible. There are, of course, other names for Jesus. We are told in Isaiah that he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace, Everlasting Father, Eternal God, Redeemer, Messiah or Christ – which means *anointed one of God*.

There is another name that I love. *Emmanuel* – which means *God is with us*. Matthew says in Chapter 1, reading a little further than our text earlier: ‘... *an angel of the Lord appeared to (Joseph) in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.*

²¹*She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.* ²²*All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: (Isaiah 7:14)*

²³*‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel’, which means, ‘God is with us.’*

The promise of this child is that God, in Jesus, is with us. Emmanuel, God is with us. If God is with us, then how could we not have hope in all things. If God is with us, we can go through the sorrows, the persecution, the grief, the loss, the struggles.

If God is with us, we can keep loving and serving and believing that what Paul says in his letter to the Philippians is true – ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.’ (Philippians 4:13)

The name Jesus is derived from the Old Testament name of Joshua. And Joshua means *one who breaks down walls*. Now we know that there are still many walls up and some that are being built even now.

But with the coming of Jesus, many walls were knocked down – at least in the kingdom of God. Jesus showed us that there are no walls in God’s eyes between men and women. Jesus included women in his ministry and treated them with respect – valued them in a world where they were not much more valuable than livestock.

Jesus also tore down the wall between Jews and Gentiles. Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians:

‘Christ is our peace. He made both Jews and Gentiles into one group. With his body, he broke down the barrier of hatred that divided us ... so now you are no longer strangers and aliens. Rather you are fellow citizens with God’s people and you belong to God’s household.’

We may not yet see hatred and racism, oppression and injustice dissolved, but the Gospels and the letters of the apostle Paul tell us that in God’s household they no longer exist. And if those ugly things do not exist in God’s kingdom then we can have hope that someday ... someday ... it will be that way for all people.

It is been said that the word HOPE can be an acronym. HOPE – Having only positive expectation. Hope is so much more than how we use that word sometimes. I hope I get that car for Christmas. I hope I can lose a little weight before the wedding. I hope I get that new dress to wear for the party.

The kind of hope the Christ child gives goes with his name – Jesus: the one who saves us; the one who breaks down, instead of building up, walls that divide and separate. Walls that represent hatred.

The kind of hope he gives is more a deep-seeded belief that, no matter what, things will be okay. I will be okay because of Emmanuel – God is with us; because of Jesus – my Savior. Our Savior. The one who came, the one who will come again to make hope a reality.

Jesus. Jesus. There’s something about that name.