



REFLECTIONS

December 22, 2013, Refreshed from the Archives of December 16, 2007

Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

Matthew 2:11

The Gift

We may never receive another gift quite like it. We recall a day several years ago when the church receptionist left a message saying, “Santa came early this year and he left a gift for you.” In our wildest dreams we would not have guessed who Santa was.

Back then Philip was a homeless man who came into our lives one Sunday from the church pew behind ours. His looks fit the image of Santa Claus and the note he wrote us at the end of the service revealed his intellect. He would later express regret that the opportunity for his life to matter may have slipped away and we wanted to help lift his spirits. But Philip stopped coming to church. We assumed that he had taken the trip to Mexico he had frequently mentioned. Then the gift came.

We were so moved by the thoughtfulness of it. We pondered what was hidden beneath the wrapping, and we were equally curious about the contents of the envelope bound around it. Curiosity or not, we wanted to savor the gift rather than open it. Finally on Christmas Eve we did. The note with it read in part:

“In a matter of hours I will be leaving for my beloved city of Morelia in Mexico where I again will be Santa Claus at a big store there. For the past month I have been gathering stuffed animals to give to the kids; my two big duffle bags are themselves stuffed with upwards of eighty ‘animales rellenos’... for beautiful children whose graciousness, courtesy, and smiles are beyond description.”

Philip was a man from the street back then. He harbored regrets that his life had not been significant; but it seems significant to me. His intention is clear and his heart is pure. His greatest desire is to make the lives of a few children a little better. And when he opened his two big duffle bags of stuffed animals, those children felt the love of Jesus Christ through a man with little else to give. Oh, if more of us would live the spirit of Christmas as well as he.

When Philip returned from Mexico that year, he was still without a home; and though no longer homeless, even now he may harbor regret for opportunities passed by. But one thing is sure. Philip understands the gift of love—the gift God gave to the world that first Christmas Day.

And the Christmas gift Philip left for us—well, the container of Ghirardelli Hot Cocoa Mix that sat among other gifts felt to us much like God’s gift to all of us that first Christmas Day—none given with more warmth; none received with more gratitude.

You are the light of the world,

Richard +

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