


***“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us ... ” (Titus 2:11-14a)***

**A**s a child, I couldn't wait for the Sears Christmas Catalog to arrive in the mail. I would spend hours looking through every page, carefully marking the items I would consider asking Santa to bring. I received a lot of great Christmas gifts over the years - many I asked for, some I didn't. In the moment, I couldn't imagine life without them; today, there is no proof of them even existing - except in my memory.



As I grew older my focus on Christmas gifts shifted, as I turned my attention to finding the perfect gifts for family members and friends. Shopping for just the right gift to give to those I loved was an adventure, a challenge to conquer. Sometimes, it was apparent that I had indeed found a gift that was perfect; other times, not so much. But the ones I shared gifts with were always grateful, even if I missed the mark.

As we prepare for another celebration of Christmas, I hope you enjoy the tradition of giving and receiving gifts. And as you do, I pray that you will claim in a fresh way and proclaim in a bold way that you know of a gift that is perfect for everyone - a gift that will last forever - and the only gift that will truly change lives: the gift of Jesus.

As you encounter the people in your life, as you meet people where they are this Christmas season, invite them to experience the gift of God's amazing love offered through Jesus. Let us just as urgently seek opportunities to again experience the gift of Jesus for ourselves.


May we be courageous and generous in sharing the gift of Jesus with those who touch our lives. When the gift of Jesus is offered and received, we find love, joy, significance, and meaning will pour into our lives. It is the gift of Jesus, and Jesus alone, that will transform us, as well as the world around us.

I continue to give thanks for the opportunity to be in ministry with the people of God in the Upper New York Conference of The United Methodist Church. You are a gift! I celebrate the many ways in which you offer all that you have SO THAT others may know that the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, and filling our lives with hope and promise.

As we share the many gifts of Christmas this year, let us not neglect to offer the gift the prophet Isaiah declared so confidently would be perfect for all of us: ***“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”*** (Isaiah 9:6)

Jodi, Tyler and Ben join me in wishing you a blessed and holy Christmas! May it be filled with joy and expectation! May it be centered on the perfect gift, the only gift that matters - the gift of Jesus!

Merry Christmas!



Bishop Mark J. Webb

