

“And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger.” We hear that every Christmas. We see those swaddling clothes in every nativity scene. And today, I want to linger there — at the manger, by the cloths, because in those simple strips of fabric, God is telling us: Jesus is our greatest gift.

We take it as a given: gifts come wrapped. Some beautifully, with ribbons and bows. Some hastily, with tape everywhere. Some in gift bags because we gave up on wrapping paper years ago. But the wrapping tells you something. It tells you the giver thought about you. It tells you something is hidden inside. It tells you there is more than meets the eye.

Luke says Jesus came *wrapped*. Not in royal robes, but in swaddling cloths, the simplest, humblest wrapping imaginable. The greatest gift the world has ever received came wrapped up, swaddled like any other baby. That’s how God works. He hides glory under humility. Majesty under weakness. Power under gentleness. The infinite God under the fragile flesh of a newborn.

When the angels appeared to the shepherds, they didn’t say, “Look for a baby glowing with heavenly light.” Nor did they say, “Go to the palace and look for a baby in the royal nursery.” They said: “This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” The wrapping and the manger and the Baby was the sign. The wrapping revealed the heart of God. The shepherds were poor, ordinary men. They knew swaddling cloths. They knew mangers. They knew the smell of animals and the cold of night.

God came *wrapped* in their world. He came *wrapped* in their humanity. He came *wrapped* in a way they could approach without fear. If He had come wrapped in glory, in power, in judgment, they would have run away. But He came wrapped in cloths. *The wrapping was the invitation.*

To this day, parents and caregivers know about swaddling. Swaddling cloths are used to bind a child nice and snug, to soothe and keep him warm, to protect him. But in Scripture, cloths also appear in another place: the tomb. At the beginning of His life, Jesus is wrapped in cloths. At the end of His life, Jesus is wrapped in cloths again.

The swaddling cloths point to the burial cloths. The gift given at Christmas is the gift wrapped on Good Friday. Scripture tells us that after Jesus died, Joseph of Arimathea asked for his body, wrapped it in linen, and placed it in a tomb. And then on that first Easter Sunday, do you remember what was discovered?

The gift given at Christmas and wrapped on Good Friday was opened that morning. “Peter got up and ran to the tomb. He bent down to look inside and saw only the strips of linen.” (Luke 24: 12) The greatest present was opened, the gift wrap set to the side.

The wrapping tells you the purpose: **Jesus was born to be given.**

Think of the best gift you ever received. Maybe a childhood toy you begged for. Maybe a book that shaped your life. Maybe a letter from someone you love. Maybe something handmade — imperfect, but priceless. The best gifts are the ones that meet a need you didn’t even know how to express.

Humanity’s greatest need is not advice. Not inspiration. Not motivation. Not a new philosophy. Our greatest need is to know that we are loved, through and through, despite our worst moments. Our greatest need is to have Someone do all the things we cannot: forgive sin, conquer death, reconcile us to God, and give eternal life.

So God gives you Jesus — delivered, wrapped, and opened. A living gift, a person, the Son of God who is always with you, and always for you. He laid down his life for you—the ultimate expression of love. Every cross you’ve ever seen is communicating to you that this is how far God would go to show you his loving kindness.

It should not surprise us then, though it often does, that God still hides His glory in humble wrappings. He comes wrapped in **water**; baptismal water that looks ordinary but carries the promise of new birth. He comes wrapped in **words**; simple human speech that delivers divine forgiveness. He comes wrapped in **bread and wine**; everyday elements that carry the body and blood of Christ.

Why does He do it this way? I think it is for the same reason that He appeared wrapped to the shepherds. He does it so you’re not afraid of Him. So you can touch Him and be touched by Him. So you can be fed by Him and comforted by Him. *The wrapping is still the invitation.*

Every earthly gift eventually fades. Toys break. Clothes wear out. Electronics become outdated. Even the most precious gifts — letters, photos, heirlooms — eventually pass into memory. But Jesus does not fade. He does not break. He does not wear out. He does not become outdated.

Jesus brings you forgiveness for your past, strength for your present, hope for your future, and life everlasting. Stretch out the hands of your heart to receive Him. He is truly the greatest gift.