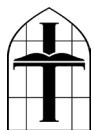


Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light*Johann von Rist (1607–1667), tr. John Troutbeck (1832–1899)*

Break forth, O beauteous heavenly light,
 And usher in the morning;
 Ye shepherds, shrink not with affright,
 But hear the angel's warning.
 This Child, now born in infancy,
 Our confidence and joy shall be,
 The power of Satan breaking,
 Our peace eternal making.

Break forth, O beauteous heavenly light,
 To herald our salvation;
 He stoops to earth—the God of might,
 Our hope and expectation.
 He comes in human flesh to dwell,
 Our God with us, Immanuel;
 The night of darkness ending,
 Our fallen race befriending.

All blessing, thanks, and praise to thee,
 Lord Jesus Christ, be given:
 Thou hast our brother deigned to be,
 Our foes in sunder riven.
 O grant us through our day of grace
 With constant praise to seek thy face;
 Grant us ere long in glory
 With praises to adore thee.



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www.centraseminary.edu | info@centraseminary.edu
 900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***Christmas Giving***Kevin T. Bauder*

I confess to some ambivalence about gift-giving at Christmas time. As an aspect of the Commercial Christmas, the giving of gifts has become something like an abomination. What once was an occasion for giving has become an obligation to give, coupled too often with the expectation of receiving. It is too often an exercise in second-guessing whether someone else intends to give; failure to reciprocate a gift ranks somewhere between a *faux pas* and a scandal. Conversely, to present a gift to someone who has not planned to reciprocate is to embarrass that person and, consequently, to embarrass one's self.

The pressure to find just the right gift begins earlier with each passing year. The number of those who are willing to offer their advice in selecting that gift is legion. The venues through which the gift might be purchased have multiplied, including both brick-and-mortar stores and on-line establishments. The compulsion to acquire such a gift has usurped days that once were devoted to family, recreation, and rest—Black Friday being the darkest example.

In the face of this rampant commercialization, some Christians have simply decided to stop giving gifts. They might make exceptions in the case of children, for whom the unwrapping of presents could still be an uncorrupted aspect of the delight of Christmas. Nevertheless, they do not give anything to each other, choosing to use Christmas as a season of focus upon the incarnation.

I confess to some sympathy with this perspective. I would love to disconnect Christmas entirely from commercialism and avarice. The refusal either to expect or to give presents seems as if it might be a radical and salutary break with an acquisitive culture. And yet....

* * *

The church at Corinth had promised to participate in an offering for the needy saints at Jerusalem. Paul was preparing to travel to Corinth and to receive that offering so that he could transport it to Judea. Evidently, however, the Corinthian believers were wavering a bit in their generosity. There was a

chance that their performance might not be as liberal as their promises had been.

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 8-9 to encourage the Corinthian Christians in their giving. Through this discourse he advances several reasons that believers ought to give unstintingly. One is particularly relevant to the present discussion.

According to Paul, Christian giving is evidence of sincerity in love (2 Cor. 8:8, 24). Believers are able to give, not because they are wealthy, but because they are willing (2 Cor. 8:12). This willingness is motivated by an unmixed love.

As an example of willing giving, Paul chose the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. When believers give sincerely, they are imitating Christ who, “though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). The self-giving of Jesus becomes a pattern for Christians to copy in their own giving.

Of course, what Paul was talking about is the incarnation and humiliation of Jesus Christ, supplemented by His passion. He was thinking of the Kenosis. Even though Christ subsisted in the form of God, He did not consider equality with God a thing to be selfishly grasped, but emptied Himself, receiving the form of a slave and coming to be in human likeness (Phil. 2:5-8). This Kenosis is the eternal Second Person of the Godhead adding to His divine person a complete human nature, being made temporarily lower than the angels, experiencing the full measure of human weakness, and through His incarnate death and resurrection defeating the one who held the power of death.

In other words, what Paul was talking about is Christmas. He was expounding the very truths to which Christmas directs our attention. In answer to the question, “Why should Christians give?” the apostle pointed to Christmas.

For Paul, giving was inseparable from Christmas. All Christian giving rests upon the foundation of the inestimable gift that they have been given, and that gift is Christ. He did not merely give life. He did not merely give salvation. He gave Himself. This is the giving that rightly motivates believers to give, and to give with an open hand.

The incarnation is our great motivation for giving. That being so, a season devoted to considering the incarnation should also logically be a season devoted to giving. During that season we will give without thought of receiving. We will give to those who could not possibly repay. We will give abundantly, liberally, lavishly, freely, and joyfully. We will give because Christ in His giving has opened the wellsprings of love in our hearts. Our

giving will become a part of the true celebration of the incarnation. We will give and bless and rejoice and celebrate, and we will be richer for it.

Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift (2 Cor. 9:15).



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
