"The Gift"

Rev. Bill Pinches

Mason, Michigan

December 24, 2025

Christmas Eve

It was December of 1978. I was eight years old. Christmas was coming. And I *knew* what I wanted for Christmas. I had pored over the toy section in the massive Sears and J.C. Penney Christmas catalogs. (How many of you remember those catalogs? Okay, all of us with our hands up – we are officially old.) Among those dozens and dozens of pages showcasing all the latest and greatest toys, there it was, in all its magnificent glory … Kenner's Star Wars Death Star Space Station playset. And it looked *amazing*. You could help Luke Skywalker and Han Solo rescue Princess Leia from Darth Vader's evil clutches. You could have a shoot-out with Stormtroopers in the control room. You could fall into the trash compactor through a trap door and be attacked by the fearful dianogu monster, or crushed by the wall that really moved. You could take the elevator to the fourth floor and help Obi-Wan Kenobi turn off the tractor beam control so that the *Millennium Falcon* could escape. You could swing Luke and Leia across that bottomless chasm using a little plastic rope to escape from the Stormtroopers. You could stage a climactic lightsaber battle between Obi-Wan Kenobi and Darth Vader. You could use the laser cannon on the top floor to shoot at X-Wing fighters, and you could blow up that laser cannon when the Rebel Alliance scored a hit. It looked … utterly … *amazing*. There had never been a toy like that before. Across the country, *millions* of children like me looked at that toy in those catalogs and said to their parents, and to Santa Claus, *I <u>want</u> that playset*. There was just one problem. It cost seventeen dollars and ninety-nine cents. That was a *ridiculous* amount of money to spend on a toy. Times have changed just a little bit since then! I put that toy at the very tippy top of my Christmas wish list. I already had a complete set of *Star Wars* action figures, all twelve of them. I *wanted* that playset … but I also knew it was *very* expensive. In the days leading up to Christmas I became more and more worried that I wouldn't get it. By December 22, 23 and 24, I was building my own version of that playset with my Lego bricks. Every attempt I made just paled in comparison to pictures of the actual thing in the catalog. I was so worried. What if I didn't get it? Finally, Christmas morning arrived. I raced out of my bedroom, I waited until my parents gave the all-clear, and I ran downstairs to the Christmas tree … and there it was. I beamed from ear to ear, and as soon as I could, I started assembling it, and then I played with it, day after day, week after week, for months and months on end. It was, without question, *the most amazing* Christmas present I had *ever* received by that point in my young life. It remains, to this day, one of a small handful of presents I ever received that made *such* a dramatic impact in my life.

That's the thing about amazing gifts, isn't it … they make *such* a dramatic impact in our lives. I'm sure you can all think back to the most amazing gifts *you* have ever received, and how much of an impact they had on *you*. How much they *excited* you, how much they *inspired* you, how much they *impacted* you. We lose ourselves in *wonder* and *joy*, *amazement* and *awe*. Gifts like that *change* us. They ignite something deep inside us, some spark of *imagination* or *creativity* or *freedom* or even *peace*.

These are the kinds of feelings that Christmas should bring to us. I'm not talking about the *tree*, or the *gift-giving*, or the *mistletoe*, or the *cookies and fudge*, or the *big dinner*, or even the family and friends that we enjoy spending time with over the holidays … or, for that matter, the tear-stained memories of the people you have loved who are no longer with you. All of those things that surround Christmas are *good*, and *wonderful*, and *meaningful*. But I'm talking about something *deeper*. I'm talking about what is at the *heart* of Christmas: the story of a little babe who came to change and save the world. What emotions does that story evoke within you? How does it make you *feel*? Does it fill you with the same sense of *excitement*? The same *wonder* and *joy*, the same *amazement* and *awe*? Does it *change* you? Does it ignite something deep within you, some spark of *love* or *peace* or *hope*?

I hope it does. I truly and sincerely hope it does fill you with magnificent feelings that brighten our days and lift our spirits. For *this* is the most amazing gift of all. It truly is better than *anything* you will ever find under a Christmas tree. It's a gift of love. A gift of hope. A gift of peace. A gift of joy.

It's a gift of *love*. It's a gift of love for everybody under the sun. Our world is filled with all sorts of inequality, injustice, and prejudice. This gift says: *every single person matters.* It doesn't matter what your gender is, it doesn't matter where you come from, it doesn't matter what you look like, it doesn't matter what language you speak. *Everybody* matters. *Everybody* is valued. *Everybody* is treasured.

It's a gift of *hope*. It's a gift that proves what we see is not all there is. Our world is filled with all sorts of suffering, decay, and death. This gift says: *there is something more.* There is a world beyond this one that we cannot perceive with our five senses. There are promises we can hold on to. When life gets rough, when things feel grim, when you want to despair, *this gift can give you reasons to hope.*

It's a gift of *peace*. It's a gift that teaches us to how we should be treating our fellow humans. Our world is filled with all sorts of greed, violence, and hate. This gift says: *there's a better way.* In the world that this gift offers, the lowly are lifted up, the hungry are fed, and the poor are made rich; the proud are scattered, the powerful are brought down, and the rich are sent away empty. If the people in this world would actually *listen* to this teacher, there would be no more war. It would just … disappear.

It's a gift of joy. It's a gift that bundles all these things together in one magnificent package. A package that is offered for *the entire world* and for *each individual person*. Imagine it sitting at home under your Christmas tree. Waiting to be opened. Waiting to *excite* you. Waiting to *inspire* you. Waiting to *impact* you. Open it, and let your life be filled with *wonder* and *joy*, *amazement* and *awe*.

For the most *amazing* Christmas present any of us have *ever* received … thanks be to God!