

Christmas Eve YA 2022

God's Gift Wrap
By the Rev. Salying Wong

I heard about a study on gift wrap. Apparently, gift wrapping a present usually sets us up for disappointment. The more beautiful the wrapping, the greater the disappointment. Have you ever felt that way? All those beautiful presents under the tree. You'd been shaking them for weeks. And now, finally, you open them—and can't help but feel a bit disappointed.

One of the recommendations from this study is to use less fancy gift wrap, like newsprint or brown paper. I have taken this to heart, using somewhat beat up paper from the previous year—just so no one gets their hopes up.

For many, gift-giving is pretty much Christmas. So much is at stake in those wrapped presents; so much happiness is riding on the tinsel and shine. So, it must be odd to really consider the Christmas story as we hear it today. Mary and Joseph are not shiny people. They are poor, uneducated, itinerant, and in need of shelter. They struggle to find it. The town of Bethlehem has no vacancies; it is full from people traveling for the census. So, they actually go outside the city, to a cave, to stay with the animals. This cave served as a stable for the innkeeper's animals. They probably weren't too far from the shepherds, who were tending to their animals.

This Christmas wrapping doesn't promise much. The package is humble. But, this gift is different. You peel back the wrapping, and you hear angels sing. You see the heavenly hosts. The song was first sung to the Shepherds, who weren't shiny people either. They were outsiders, being ritually impure according to Jewish custom. And so, they really didn't belong. But they were the first ones to see the baby Jesus after he was born—the first ones to touch the holy.

That's how it is with our God. God doesn't come for us because we are shiny. God comes for us no matter what—in our longing, confusion, need. Jesus is called Emmanuel because God is with us no matter what the packaging. No matter what is inside us, God is not disappointed. We do not need to pretend to be better than we are. We do not need to give God anything. All that is needed is to receive—may you receive God love for you this Christmas.