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## Best Gift

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## Best Gift

If we ask children about the best Christmas gift they hope to receive, we expect that most will name something that they can possess or use. As we have grown and matured, we likely would have noticed that people older than us were far more interested in who they hoped to see, welcome, or visit rather than something that they might receive. We might now recognize that the best gift we can give and receive is to be with those we love.

Because we love, we bring not only ourselves to others, but material gifts as well; we also engage in traditions and celebrations of family, office, and other groups to which we belong; and, we also participate in communal rituals. We manifest our caring presence to others by giving of our best gift: our time and attentiveness.

The celebration of Christmas affords us an opportunity to reflect and to appreciate all of the best gifts we give and receive including companionship with Jesus.

If we were to ask God what might be the best gift to receive the answer would certainly be, us. Why else would God, having already created the entire universe, go to all the trouble of becoming a human – a seemingly contradictory thing to do? The birth of Christ reveals that in all of creation, God loves us with all our weaknesses and limitations, and chooses to be with us.

By being born as one of us, Jesus perfectly and fully affirms that we are indeed created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, looking at the human Christ we can see ourselves at our best. We were not born with all the knowledge we have now, and we did not begin life with a clear desire to make a positive contribution to human society. Like Jesus, we needed to grow and to learn about all that makes life meaningful and to make decisions about how we will express our love. Since the birth of Christ, we have been given the possibility of recognizing not only that God values human life in general, but that the unique course of our personal growth and development coincides with that of God's human form.

The finest "self-help" book for becoming "the best that we can be" is the Gospels. By imaginatively observing the person of Christ, and reflecting on what we notice in our experience, we find ourselves drawn not primarily to copying the specific behavior of Jesus, but to becoming more fully the woman or man corresponding with our God-given gifts just as Jesus matched his calling. Those who spend quality time with the Jesus of the Gospels discover that their identification is with Christ in the present, not the

far distant past. We become, like Jesus, those who love all people inclusively, not just one or a few exclusively.

When we recognize that being with us is the best gift God gives us, and being with God is the best gift we can give to God, we have come to understand with our hearts the full meaning of Christmas.