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Christmas Presence

"Christmas is for children... just for children", croons Glenn Campbell, showing, perhaps, a lack of theological subtlety. Of course, no-one would begrudge children the joy that accompanies their present opening, and the fun of the play thereafter, but there is always at Christmas time the lurking danger of the whole gift-giving process collapsing into an unthinking, arid materialism, and of forming too firm an association in our (and their) minds between reciprocal love and the exchange of material goods.

The tradition from which our own practice of gift-giving derives is, of course, the offering of gifts to the infant Jesus by the Magi. Their intention in doing so, though, was not to provide Jesus with Boxing Day fun, but to acknowledge some rather more serious convictions about his birth: namely, that here was the arrival of a Universal King, announced by the stars themselves to the whole world, recognised by shepherds, angels and mysterious wise men from the East as of cosmic significance, a High Priest for the whole world, come to intercede with God for mankind, born to die for others, God made man. Try telling that to your four year old, Glenn Campbell.

Gregory Nazianzen (4th Century) captured the way in which the birth of Jesus begins God's final revelation of his own, ultimate wisdom rather more elegantly: "the immaterial becomes incarnate, the Word is made flesh, the invisible makes itself seen, the intangible can be touched, the timeless has a beginning, the Son of God becomes the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, always the same, yesterday, today and forever."