

Christmas Gifts

By Al Riskowski

I will never forget the first Christmas my wife and I celebrated as the Senior Pastor of a small church in South Dakota. We were young and even younger students from a nearby Bible School volunteered to help with the Church ministry. The church was not only small but poor. It was so poor that after the two Sunday services and a Wednesday night Bible study the Church would give to us 75% of the total offerings taken; sometimes that would come to a total of \$25. Money was scarce during those days for our young family.

At Christmas I wanted to express my thanks to the handful of students who helped us. So we sacrificed and bought each one an expensive pen set. I suppose one young man was expecting something more. When he opened his present he reacted with a groan and threw the set on the sofa and left. My wife and I were shocked and saddened at his reaction. He did not understand the sacrifice and love that we had placed in that gift. This memory reminds me of the way too many people treat the gift of God's Son.

Is your family grateful for God's wonderful gift?

When Jesus was born a sign appeared in the sky. Magi from the Far East recognized it as a fulfillment of an ancient Hebrew prophecy. They immediately organized a caravan and set out in search of the new king. When they arrived in Jerusalem they asked, "Where is the newly born King of the Jews? We know He is alive for we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." The residents of Jerusalem were skeptical of these so-called Wise Men. They finally told the Magi to go to Bethlehem, for their prophet Micah had said the Messiah was to be born in that city. However, there is no indication that anyone from Jerusalem followed the Magi to seek the Messiah. Think of it, not one priest, not one scribe or Pharisee cared enough to check it out. Few would recognize the great love and sacrifice that was shown through God's Son sent for our redemption. How great was Christ's rejection! John said it this way, "Although He made the world, the world did not recognize him when He came. Only a few would welcome and receive Him. But to all who received Him, He gave the right to become the children of God" (John 1:10-12).

Is your family grateful for God's wonderful gift? Has Christ become central in your family? If your answer is yes, then you know exactly what John meant when he said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life."

I pray that your family will have a wonderful and blessed Christmas as you remember the most remarkable gift ever given. The greatest hope for a blessed America is through our service to Christ. Merry Christmas!