

Christmas Sermon 2011. St. George. Fr. Hugh

What's Christmas really all about? Why! The Christmas presents of course. Everyone knows that.

- [If you haven't already bought your Christmas presents, don't worry - the stores are open till midnight.]

Christmas Day - (If you haven't already bought your Christmas presents by Christmas Day, don't worry - she'll understand. After all, you're retired and don't have much time on your hands.)

So here are some useful tips on shopping for women and for men.

We'll start with the worst gifts to buy a woman:

Never give a woman any kind of household appliance, or something to make "housework" easier. Such as a blender, a toaster, a new vacuum, or one of those mops they advertise on TV that does everything but fold your clothes.

Never any bulk cleaning supplies from SAMS - "Honey, I got you that large box of Tide you've been wanting." "This Windex should last you a while." "I got a good deal on the industrial strength toilet bowl cleaner." All I can say is, be prepared to duck.

Any sharp objects made by Ronco which slices or dices, or a set of Ginsu knives. These may one day be used as a weapon against you when you come home after a night out with the boys.

No name perfume which costs you \$1.99, such as Eau de Toilette, which actually smells like moldy fruit, or dirty socks. If you're going to buy her perfume, spring for the brand names.

Please do not buy her clothes because you think for one minute you have good taste in woman's clothing. Believe me, she'll smile and say "its beautiful" while choking back tears and mumbling under her breath, "where on earth would I ever wear this outfit without being arrested for bad taste?"

Do not give her a gift certificate to Jenny Craig or Weight Watchers. Fortunately most men know better, especially the ones who have learned the correct response to "do these pants make me look fat?"

Last but not least, never buy a woman 'anti-wrinkle cream'. These are not considered gifts. They are considered reasons for inflicting serious bodily harm on the person who gave it, and they may well stand up in a court of law.

Buying gifts for men is of course not nearly as complicated as it is for women. Follow these rules and you should have no problems.

Rule #1:

You can buy men new remote controls to replace the ones they have worn out.

If you have the money buy your man a 65" TV with the little picture in the corner. Watch him go wild as he flips, and flips, and flips.

Rule #2: Never buy a man anything that says "Some assembly required" on the box.

It will ruin his Special Day and he will always have parts left over. No one knows why.

Rule #3: When in doubt - buy him a cordless drill. It does not matter if he already has one.

As a man, you can never have too many **cordless drills**. No one knows why.

Rule #4: Buy men a label maker. It's almost as good as a cordless drill. Within a couple of weeks there will be labels absolutely everywhere. "Socks. Shorts. Cups. Saucers. Door. Lock. Sink." You get the idea.

Rule #5: Men love chain saws.

Never, ever, buy a man you love a chain saw.

If you don't know why - please refer to Rule #4 and what happens when he gets a label maker.

Rule #6:

Men enjoy danger. That's why they never cook - but they will barbecue. Get him a monster barbecue with a 100-pound propane tank.

Tell him the gas line leaks. "Oh the thrill! The challenge! Who wants a hamburger?"

The last few weeks have shown us an absurd level of commercialism.

We all want the true meaning of Christmas to shine through the blur of shopping madness.

A lady who works at the bank was saying to me how difficult it is sometimes to focus on the true reason

for Christmas, while everything around us seems to distract us from it.

Perhaps like me, when you're leaving a store and someone says to you 'Happy Holidays', you look them in the eye, smile and pointedly say, "Merry Christmas." A surprising number of people smile right back and reply "Merry Christmas," glad to be able to say what they wanted to say in the first place.

Who would have imagined that saying "Merry Christmas" would ever be seen as politically incorrect?

There's been frequent talk on the television about how they can get the religion out of Christmas, with

the glaring irony that this 'holiday' only exists precisely because it is the most holy day.

Tim Tebow, who has the effrontery to pray in public has been talked about more than the person he prays to, whose birthday we come to celebrate tonight.

It's all upside down and frankly very silly.

One of the great freedoms available to people in the free world is the opportunity to acknowledge and worship the Lord.

And thanks be to God, we are free to come together tonight to celebrate the coming of the Christ to earth, the birth of the baby Jesus.

And so here we are. But we inevitably have other things going on in their minds - the things we haven't managed to get done; meal preparation still to do; or thoughts of the games that you want to watch this weekend.

With so much that competes for our attention it is good for us to be here.

There is something wonderful that happens when we get together to celebrate Our Savior's birth. You come to church, quite possibly feeling tired or overwhelmed.

Yet the moment you walk into our beautifully decorated church, and see the wonder of the symbols of Christmas, and hear the beauty of timeless Christmas carols, the Holy Spirit wraps Himself

around you and follows you to your pew. The beauty of this great day is with you.

Then the Holy Spirit hovers around the altar of our God and radiates the Spirit of the Lord and tells you: "Stop worrying. Listen. Be still and know God."

For sure there are many people out there who cannot find meaning in Christmas, and cannot find meaning in their lives.

But fortunately we are not like that.

We are blessed to know that the ultimate life-changing event took place two thousand years ago.

It is inconceivably wonderful that the eternal Christ was incarnated as a human being, that God's Son

was born as a baby boy. In his incarnation we can all recognize ourselves.

We can relate to God because He related to us, by becoming one of us.

Sometimes people say:

"Well if I were God, I wouldn't let this happen. I wouldn't let that happen."

That reminds me of a poster we had in our youth group room in my previous parish. It said:

"There are two important things to know:

One - There is a God; and Two - It's not you."

We might imagine what we'd do if we were God, but we can't do anything about it. Which is just as well.

Because if any of us were God we would certainly prefer to remain being mighty and unlimited.

Yet God is so all-loving that He chose to do the most extraordinary thing. The Christ willingly and freely gave up all the perfect freedom of Spirit and chose instead to be bound by all the limitations of time and space, the limitations of being a human being, and the pain and suffering that goes with being in a physical body.

He chose a life of suffering over a life of perfect peace and joy, so that He could lift us out of a life of suffering into the life of perfect peace and joy.

Every person feels a tension between being a physical being with physical needs and desires, and being a spiritual being with spiritual aspirations.

When the infinite Christ gave Himself to be born a baby He created the possibility of us having a perfect, holy union of our spirit and our body.

There are a lot of great movies that have been made about time-travel.

But no-one has ever actually done it.

No-one, that is, except for when the Christ pierced through the Dome of Eternity and came down to us as a baby in a manger - the Son of God and the son of the wonderful young mother Mary.

Before Jesus was born God was distant and terrifying. As a baby he could be held and touched just like any baby.

God became one of us, so we can know for sure that we could relate to Him.

Jesus was born in very unpleasant circumstances.

We have romanticized the stable in Bethlehem, but it was dirty, smelly and unhygienic; and what mother would want to put her newborn baby in a feeding trough?

He was born without any of the advantages that we want for our children and grandchildren.

He went from all powerful to all vulnerable.

He taught us: "Don't be afraid. Live as I live. Take the risks of love. Take the risks of kindness. Believe

that you are much more than just a physical being with a brief existence.

Believe that you will live for ever and that your body and your spirit are united with God."

He said, "Believe that I am God and that I love you absolutely and will not reject you. Believe that I love you and forgive you and accept you. Believe in me, and love me as I love you."

On this delightful night in this beautiful church we can use our imagination, and in our mind's eye we can follow the star; and follow the shepherds; and express heartfelt adoration for the Christ-child, the baby Jesus who came from Heaven to earth.

Don't you feel as I do how marvelous it is that the true Christian faith would have so inconspicuous a beginning in Bethlehem?

Who would have imagined that this baby in a manger, would come to be worshipped and followed throughout the centuries and around the world, by all kinds of people who would recognize him as their Lord and Savior?

This faith in Christ has been translated into countless noble lives, with great saints like St. Francis and countless unknown people who lived out the Christian life.

This faith has been expressed magnificently in the architecture of the great cathedrals; transcendently

painted by the likes of Michelangelo and Leonardo Da Vinci; set to music by the likes of Bach and Handel.

This faith in Christ is the foundation of our civilization. It is the foundation of everything that is good, everything that is noble, everything that is pure, everything that is lovely.

This Faith began on a crisp night all those years ago, when Mary had her baby and laid him in a manger.

It is the foundation of a life of love and peace and joy, here and now in this life, and in the life to come.