

THE HERALD

Newsletter of the Orrville Grace Brethren Church

The Forgotten Giver of Christmas

By Marshall Segal

He can get lost among the shepherds, pushed aside by wise men, overshadowed by the angels, outshined by the star over Bethlehem. You won't see him standing in nativity scenes, hanging on trees, velcroed onto Advent calendars, or printed on wrapping paper. He's absent from many carols. Has any figure in the Christmas story been more marginalized, or even forgotten, than God the Father?

The longer one stops to reflect on the common oversight, the stranger it becomes. The Father sent his Son to make his worst enemies into beloved children, and yet he's crowded out by other, more earthly details — the kind of details that can be finely painted on ornaments. No one, however, played a more significant role in Christmas — not Joseph or Mary, not prophets or wicked kings, certainly not shepherds or magi. Even Jesus himself could only be *the Son* that first Christmas because God is also eternally, unavoidably, almost inconceivably *Father*.

And he is gloriously the Father “all the way down.” Michael Reeves writes,

The fact that Jesus is “the Son” really says it all. Being a Son means he has a Father. . . . That is who God has revealed himself to be: not first and foremost Creator or Ruler, but Father. . . . He *is* Father. All the way down. Thus all that he does he does as Father. That is who he is. He creates as a Father and he rules as a Father. (*Delighting in the Trinity*, 21–23)

Advent reminds us that we have a Savior, a Redeemer, a Brother and King, but also that we have an almighty Father of infinite wisdom and relentless love, a Father who authored that first Christmas and every one since.

Only Son from the Father

If we sometimes forget the Father during Advent, the Son surely does not. Nowhere is this more evident than in his prayer the night he was betrayed. “Father, the hour has come,” he prays. “Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only

true God, and Jesus Christ *whom you have sent*” (John 17:1–3). Why mention that the Father sent him? To emphasize, all the more clearly, that he truly is the Son of God who came from the Father, to bring us to the Father, for the glory of the Father.

And Jesus doesn’t mention the sending just once. The whole prayer centers around this burden: that the world would know that *the Father sent the Son*.

- “I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them *and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me*” (John 17:8).
- “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, *so that the world may believe that you have sent me*” (John 17:20–21).
- “O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, *and these know that you have sent me*” (John 17:25).

As Jesus prepares to die, as he faces the horrors of betrayal, injustice, torture, derision, and crucifixion, he prays, over and over again, *Father, I want them to know that you sent me*.

‘Even as You Loved Me’

Why do we leave the Father behind at Christmas? Maybe, among other reasons, because we subtly begin pitting the Father against the Son — the God of wrath against

the God of love. Because Christ bore the wrath of the Father at the cross, and was always destined to do so, we can begin to imagine an enmity in the Trinity, as if the Son came to *take on* the Father for us, as if the Son intervened to challenge the Father’s wrath. But when Jesus prays, he says,

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. (John 17:22–23)

Yes, “it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief” (Isaiah 53:10). Yes, the Son was “stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted” (Isaiah 53:4). But when the Son came to earth, he came covered in his Father’s love and sent into a world the Father loved (John 3:16). Jesus says, “The Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God” (John 16:27). And when the Father set his love on us, at the excruciating expense of his Son, he did not love his Son less. He loved him *more* for his sacrifice. Jesus says, “*For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again*” (John 10:17).

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the God of love and the God of wrath because they are one God — the Father sending, the Son coming, dying, and rising, the Spirit reviving and illuminating.

Of the Father’s Love Begotten

God’s love for his Son didn’t keep him

from sending his Son to save us. His love — for his Son *and for us* — prompted God to send him.

After all, it was God who promised the child, a son, “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). No one anticipated his coming more than the one who sent him, and no one rejoiced over him more than the one who sent him. And no one was more eager to exalt him, first at Christmas (Luke 2:13–14) and climactically at his resurrection (Philippians 2:9–11).

And so, we sing (not every Christmas hymn leaves him out):

Of the Father's love begotten
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the Source, the Ending he,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see,
Evermore and evermore!

This is he whom they in old time
Chanted of with one accord,
Whom the voices of the prophets
Promised in their faithful word;
Now he shines, the long-expected;
Let creation praise its Lord,
Evermore and evermore.

Before God planted the first pine tree, the Christmas story had already been planned — the story of the “life of the Lamb who was slain,” which was “written before the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). Before the Father lit the sun with fire, he had already begun digging the ground where the cross

would one day stand. He always knew that Jesus would one day take on flesh and, eventually, shed his own blood. A begotten love, a steadfast love, a sent love — a love poured out on us.

Sent and Sending Son

The sending did not end that first Christmas. The Father will send the Son again. But between now and then, *we* are the sent ones. Jesus prays, “As you sent me into the world, *so I have sent them into the world*” (John 17:18). Just as God the Father sent his Son into the world, God the Son now sends us into the world — not just to live here for a while longer, but to tell as many as we can that the Father sent the Son to die so that our sins could be forgiven, our hearts renewed, our minds purified, our future brightened, and our joy filled.

Nothing compares to the Creator of the universe sending the radiance of his own glory, the exact imprint of his nature, into his creation. Until Jesus sends you. After he rises from the dead, he says it again, before he ascends into heaven, “Peace be with you. *As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you*” (John 20:21). As the Father sent the Son — planned before the foundation of the world, demonstrating God’s infinite beauty, strength, and worth, paying for the sins of people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation, with billions and billions of destinies hanging in the balance — so the Son now sends us.

Let Christmas remind you that the Son was sent, in love, from heaven, and that you are sent, in love, on earth.

FUNNIES

An auto mechanic in the hospital was chatting nervously with his surgeon while being prepped for operation. "Sometimes I wish I'd gone into your line of work," he told the doctor. "Everything you doctors do is so cut and dried and tidy. With me, I spend half a day taking an engine apart and putting it back together, and it seems I always have a couple of parts left over."

"Yes," said the surgeon. "I know the feeling."

Three engineers, electrical, chemical, and software, are traveling in a car, when suddenly, the vehicle just stops by the side of the road. The three engineers look at each other, wondering what could be wrong.

The electrical engineer suggests stripping down the electronics of the car and trying to trace where a fault might have occurred.

The chemical engineer suggests that perhaps the fuel has broken down and caused the problem.

The software engineer then offers his suggestion: "Why don't we close all the windows, get out, get back in, and open the windows again? Maybe it'll work!"

Sweat is the cologne of accomplishment.

A newly hired lawyer was determined to make a big impression at the law firm. His opportunity came soon after he settled into his new office, when the secretary called him on the intercom to let him know a man was there to see him. The young hot-shot immediately picked up the phone, and when the prospective client entered his office, the lawyer was talking as though he had some big deal cooking. He spoke of a million dollar contract, of some cartel, about a prestigious law firm in another city, and on and on.

Finally, convinced that the man who was waiting must surely be impressed, he hung up the phone and asked him what he could do for him. The man replied, "I'm here to hook up your new phone."

For those who are office workers, and don't want to spend the money for those fancy exercise machines, here is a little secret for building arm and shoulder muscles.

Begin by standing behind your desk with a five pound potato sack in each hand. Extend your arms straight out to your sides and hold them as long as you can. After a few weeks, move up to ten pound potato sacks, and then fifty pound potato sacks, and finally get to where you can lift a hundred pound potato bag in each hand and hold your arms straight for more than a minute.

Next, start putting a few potatoes in the sacks, but be careful, not to overdo it.