

God's Gift Box  
Matthew 2: 13-18  
December 26, 2010

Happy Boxing Day! For those of you who read the church newsletter and did your homework, you know I'm not referring to a special Heavy Weight contest held at Jerry World today—nor does it have to do with the Golden Gloves Boxing matches that used to be held right here at East Dallas Christian Church!

It also has nothing to do with us encouraging you to recycle the boxes that may have littered your floors yesterday during the Christmas present free-for-all that occurs in some families. (However, I suppose you all know that if you WANT to recycle your boxes—we do have containers in the back of the church for just such a need.)

No, those of you who did your homework probably discovered that Boxing Day is a holiday observed primarily in Great Britain and its commonwealths around the world. It falls the day after Christmas and the purpose of this holiday that has been observed since the Middle Ages is two-fold:

First, the multitude who were born into the peasant class, those who served the nobility, were often called to work Christmas Day for their Lords and Ladies. The day after Christmas, then, became their holiday—a day in which they would take empty boxes to the manor, and would receive their Christmas bonus in the form of left-over Christmas dinners and new clothing and other practical items for the next year. Because of the visual image of tens if not hundreds of individuals lining the estate steps with boxes in their arms ready to receive their Christmas gifts, the day became known as Boxing Day.

The Church played a part in the observance of the day, too. Traditionally on Christmas Day, the clergy of congregations in Great Britain would open the locked boxes in which alms for the poor had been collected all year long. On the day after Christmas, the coins from those alms boxes were divided and handed out to the needy—thus another root of the naming of Boxing Day.

Boxing Day became a tradition in the Western church in the middle ages which shifted the Christmas Day focus from the giving and receiving of material gifts

to friends and family to the donating of gifts to neighbors and strangers in need.

And so today, since our Sunday worship service falls the day after Christmas, we, too, are going to observe the Boxing Day tradition! We have Boxes set up in the front of the sanctuary, and if you happened to bring food for the North Texas Food Bank, at the end of the service you're welcome to come down and fill the boxes. If you didn't bring food items, but want to contribute to our Boxing Day gifting, then during the offering you can write a check for the extension of our Christmas Offering—the proceeds going to our denominational mission both at home and overseas, and to our work with Juliette Fowler Homes down the street from us.

I'd like to invite us to claim this Boxing Day as the holiday when God's gift boxes are given out.

If the truth of the matter were to be known, God's gift boxes have been given out long before even the Middle Ages. God's gift boxes were given from the moment of Jesus birth, according to Christian tradition.

This morning's scripture picks up after one of the most familiar parts of the Christmas story—after the visit of the magi bearing gifts for the Baby Jesus.

The gospel of Matthew tells of the sages from the East following a star to the site of where the infant Christ was born. In 2:10-11 we hear: *When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh."*

Those boxes held odd gifts for a baby, to be sure. But there are several traditions about how those gift boxes were truly divinely inspired, given and wrapped for the baby Jesus.

The most familiar reason for the gifts is that the gold was later used to form a chalice from which Jesus drank wine at the last supper, while the frankincense and myrrh were used by Mary Magdalene and the other women to prepare his

body at the time of his burial. The gifts of the Magi foreshadowed his ultimate end.

Another tradition may hold more credence after reading the scripture for today which tells of Joseph and Mary's hasty escape to Egypt to protect their child from Herod's mad massacre of boy children two years of age and younger.

The gold was needed to purchase lodging and other items on their journey, while the myrrh and frankincense were used medicinally for scrapes and other illnesses the Holy Family suffered along the way.

Yet another tradition shares use for those unusual gifts boxed by strangers from the Orient:

(read the skit)

Conclusion: