



**GIFTS FROM GOD:**  
***The Epiphany of the Lord 2015:***  
***The Gift of God's Surprises***

Merry Christmas everyone! Joy to the world. The Lord has come. Over the course of the eighteen days of Christmas I am presenting to you a total of **four amazing gifts from God**. These gifts are designed especially with you in mind and are capable of affecting tremendous positive change in your life.

On the first day of Christmas we opened the gift of God's care. God really cares about you. Since caring is who God is at his deepest level he chooses to identify with you particularly in the poverty stricken areas of your life so that you can prosper. On the fourth day of Christmas we opened the gift that God can be totally trusted. We know this to be true because God has said so for thousands of years. Simply trusting God is simply wonderful. Doing so will prevent you from coming up with all kinds of outrageous conclusions about God which lead to no telling where.

Last week I told you that the next gift from God would be a surprise. What I didn't tell you is that I literally meant it. The third gift I present for you to open is the gift of God's surprises. As someone said, "surprises are one of the best parts of being a Christian." When I think of God's surprises the image of Jesus doing a belly laugh comes to mind. Do you know the picture I'm talking about? It came out a few years ago? With a loud deep laugh Jesus looks at you and says, "Gotcha!"

When was the last time you laughed so hard over one of God's surprises? Maybe it's been too long? Surprises aren't always easy to receive, not because God wants to be difficult but because you make it hard on yourself. Here's a couple of 'for instances.' It's hard to be open to what God is doing in your life if you're constantly preoccupied and self-absorbed with yourself and others. Additional surprise killers are negativity, boredom and resignation. The perfect illustration of these points comes out of Isaiah. The Israelites had been uprooted from their homeland and transplanted in foreign lands. After several years the only thing that could be heard coming from the people was their chronic belly aching **yet** God had already started the process of returning them to their homeland. God says to them in Isaiah 49:19 "See I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up. Do you not see it?"

Let me offer you a few quick bullet points on how to better receive God's gift of surprises in your life.

**First, live in the present moment.** Surprises are meant to be found in the present because that's the only place we live. The past is in the past and the future is in the future. We only have this moment and surprises are everywhere! I really like the simplicity of Gandhi on this. He said, "If you don't find God in the next person you meet, it is a waste of time looking for him further." Always remember on this point what God said in the book of Chronicles: The eyes of the Lord look back and forth over all the earth for people that he can surprise with his blessings!

**Second, be God's instrument of surprises for others.** We are often times God's messengers of surprises to others. This is a true story which happened to me this week. I had placed my order in the drive through at McDonalds. While waiting I was jotting down notes for this message. When I get to the first window the attendant hands my payment back and says the person ahead of me had paid for my meal. What a pleasant surprise! It made my day. What we need to do for others is simply 'pass it forward.' How are you at making somebody's day through a little surprise? It can be as easy as a thoughtful phone call or text message. Remember the words of Mother Teresa. "It is Christmas every time you let God love others through you...yes, it is Christmas every time you smile at someone and offer them your hand."

**Third, never forget God's ultimate surprise.** This is the encouraging word in today's gospel and why we call this the epiphany of the Lord. It is the ultimate surprise which is that salvation through Jesus is for everyone to receive. I like how Paul penned it in our second reading. "it has now been revealed...that the Gentiles (that's us) are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise of Christ Jesus through the gospel." Chew on that for a while and see if it doesn't knock you out of your seat. I like how Rick Warren put it. "What surprises me most about God is that the Creator of the universe should want a relationship with me." It is this ultimate surprise that will make you passionate about life and infuse you with meaning, purpose and joy.

I would like to leave you with two thoughts for reflection:

1. In October of last year Pope Francis said that we should ask God for a heart that loves God's surprises. Why not take the plunge and ask God for that heart? You just might be pleasantly surprised!
2. Could you use a little more astonishment, awe, wonder and being stunned, electrified, bewildered and dumbfounded in your life? If so, I strongly encourage you to continue deepening your relationship with Jesus.