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First Christian Church  
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## Delight

John 1:1-5, 14 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. This is the message we have heard... and proclaim to you, that God is light and in [God] there is no darkness at all.

Isaiah 65:17-19a For behold I create new heavens and a new earth.... be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. 19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people

Have you heard the story of the precocious little girl who was gathered one Christmas afternoon with all her extended family? I suspect some of you can imagine that scene in your mind's eye from your own experience – folks sated from indulging and over-indulging in all the Christmas goodies that conspire against our waistlines this time of year, various folks who – like in every family – have their quirks and foibles but who love each other nonetheless even if they have determined they really do need to not talk politics, the extroverts more and more energized and the introverts looking for places to hide, the tree that had been so festooned with packages and ribbons and tinsel now looking a little forlorn with the debris of joyous present-opening spread about, and at least one intriguing present that came without the proper batteries leaving its anticipated animation unfulfilled until another day. Can you see it in your mind's eye? Can you hear one of those kindly aunts or uncles turn to the little girl and say “*Did you get everything you wanted for Christmas?*” And listen to how that small but wise one answered, “*No, but then, after all, it's not **MY** birthday, is it?*”

When I was three years old, it was my birthday, and my parents had planned a birthday party and had invited about a dozen of my neighborhood and pre-school friends. And my mother used to delight in telling the story of how, fifteen minutes before the appointed hour, I stood up at the screen door of that little house in Ft. Worth, Texas, peering outside and swiveling my head to look up and down the sidewalks, all bathed and dressed up for the grand event, and saying in a loud and whiny voice *“Well, where are all my present-bringers!?!”*

That little girl at that Christmas gathering was wiser than I was, for while it was my birthday indeed, it would take me many more years to realize that the largest joy of Christmas, or birthdays, or any other occasion for presents is not so much in the receiving, but in the glories of giving, and that even when it was my turn to receive and while I have received many wondrous things over the years from those who grace my life with their love, the greatest present of all is to see the joy that they take in giving. Am I not right? Don't you just shiver a little in expectation and glee when you are convinced that you have found the perfect present for someone, something that he or she will take joy from? And isn't part of the wonder of that moment the fact that your recipient not only is indeed delighted by what you give but also delighted by the joy it gives you to give?

Do you know why God gave us Jesus? Do you know why God gave those uncounted expressions of grace going back to Hebrew people and continuing through Christ and even to this very moment? It is because God takes delight in giving. And because God takes delight in our delight. Did you hear how the prophet Isaiah put it, oh-so-simply, speaking for God? *“I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its*

*people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people....” I will* **delight** *in my people.* The gift of Christ, the gift of that light that shines even when things seem darkest, that light that cannot, will not be put out, is an expression of a God who never ceases in taking delight in giving, and who wants to delight in us. It’s such a powerful word – **delight**. Not mere pleasure, not just feels-sort-of-good-I-guess, not just a sense of mild satisfaction, but delight, delight! God wants us to take joy in our lives, God wants us to find purpose, God wants us to know promise and sends Christ to show us how. Now, God weeps, God weeps, when human beings reject that gift, or when they turn that delight into dirges, or when they do evil in horrific ways.

But the good news, the unstinting, unending, not-to-be-extinguished good news of Christmas this night is that God has not and will not give up seeking to grace our lives and the life of this world, seeking to bring good from evil, seeking to overcome poverty with fullness, seeking to engender hope in the hopeless and hurting. That is who God is, that is what Christ showed us, and it is God’s continuing desire that delight will be God’s companion and our companions on our journey together.

Let us return to that precocious little girl’s observation, *“After all, it’s not MY birthday,”* and ask, then – as we have been asking all through Advent – *“What can I give Him,”* for after all, it **IS** indeed his birthday. Well, my answer is this: What we can give to Jesus is to seek to ever more fully make this a world of delight for ourselves and for others. We can hug our children tighter. We can resolve to make sure that we do just a little more to hasten the day that **no** child goes un-hugged and un-loved. We can say “I’m sorry” when we have hurt. We can stake out a portion of every day where we do nothing but give thanks for the things that grace our lives, and we can decide how

we can do just a little bit more to help those whose lives are more grind than grace. Those are the sorts of things we can give Him. But we don't do so because we must, but because we may, we gloriously may. For our God will never coerce – even when we sometimes think we wish that were so – but will always patiently, persistently, powerfully keep on offering love to a sometimes loved-starved world.

And so our choice, this night and every day and night to come is whether we delight in that gift of grace and whether, in turn, we offer it on, whether we reflect that light into someone's darkness. For it IS Christ's birthday and we are indeed His present-bringers, following in the footsteps of those shepherds, those Wise Men, and those men and women and children in every age who have taken delight in the Good News and brought their gifts, their words, their actions, their attitudes joyously and generously – and with delight. May it be so on this night and every night. Merry Christmas.