

Gift wrapped: God's plan to call love out of us

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [December 12, 2006](#) issue

My neighborhood offers Christmas shoppers lots of help: the counters are full, and the windows have been elegantly displaying gift suggestions since mid-October. I am led to ponder the original gift that generated this phenomenon of Christmas—a small, quiet, intimate gift of love in the birth of a child. What this is about, I remind myself, is God and God's love and God's plan to call love out of us.

The Greeks taught that God is perfect. By that they meant that God is complete, that God has no needs, no hopes, no aspirations. God doesn't need anything. God's perfection, the Greeks thought, meant that God is isolated, unchanging, unfeeling. The Greek word for it is *apatheia*. If God had feelings, became angry or happy, hated or loved, God would be as vulnerable as any human being—a preposterous idea, they thought.

Then came a new idea—that God loves, that God is love, love with all the risk and vulnerability and heartbreak that go along with love. Douglas John Hall says that the basic Christian assertion is the opposite of the Greek idea: "God is God only in relationship," Hall wrote. God cares so deeply, loves so passionately, that it hurts.

Twenty centuries ago a man by the name of John wrote to a beleaguered church in Asia Minor: "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God. . . . God is love and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them."

That's the bottom line. God is love. Those who love live in God and God lives in them. The highest and best of our humanity occurs when we love one another, when we care for and respect one another. We are put here to love, Sister Joan Chittister says, not for the sake of the other alone, but for our sake as well.

To be able to love, to have love planted in your heart, to have love called out of you, is to be alive. The perfect gift is a gift that awakens your own love, that draws love out of you—perhaps against your will or better judgment, your normally cautious

reserve that warns you to be careful, not to care too much, not to risk being hurt, not to be extravagant.

That is what Christmas is: God coming to the world in love—humble, vulnerable, weak love; God coming in the birth of a child; God coming to refashion us into the men and women we are intended to be. “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.”