

I begin this morning with a late 19th century Russian fable, slightly re-written for this wonderful season.

It is the story of a fisherman and his wife.

Their home was a humble two roomed cottage with a tiny garden and a well.

Every day the fisherman would go out in his little boat and in the evening bring home his catch, sometimes good, sometimes poor. This was their livelihood.

One day the discontented fisherman's wife declared: "Why should I have to live in this hovel?

Is it too much to expect a decent home with water and electricity and a kitchen? I wish I was a lady."

Her continual grouching made the fisherman quite miserable.

One day, something happened which changed their lives. The man caught a strange & beautiful fish

which startled him by speaking. "Please thrown me back into the sea and I'll grant whatever you wish."

The fisherman thought a bit and then replied, "So be it. I wish my wife was a lady and lived in a proper house with water, electricity and a kitchen."

When he returned that evening he found that his wish had been granted, and his wife was very pleased.

But as the months passed she began to grumble again, "Is it too much to expect something better than this insignificant house? I wish I was a Duchess, with a mansion and servants and a carriage.

Why did you ask for so little? I'm sure the fish meant us to do better than this."

Driven by her complaints & nagging, the fisherman rowed his boat back to the spot to try to contact the fish again.

No sooner had he called than the fish appeared and agreed to his request.

But the duchess was still not satisfied. Within a month she was grumbling and complaining again.

"I wish I was a queen, go and see your fish again". And so he did.

Life in the palace was luxurious, but the fisherman's wife, now a queen, wasn't content for long. "What I would really like" she said, "is to be master of the sun – I want to make it rise when I choose, set when I choose and

stand still when I choose." I'm sure your fish will understand that this is what I wanted all along."

"Oh wife," the fisherman asked, "Do you want to be god?" "That's just what I want!" she replied.

When the man returned from his last visit to his fishy friend, he found no palace on the shore, no mansion,
not a house. Not even his little old cottage was there. But then he heard crying,
and noticing a cave in the cliff face, he went closer.

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Inside it was fashioned into a rough stable. There were 2 oxen and a donkey.

And in the manger a little baby lay crying. The fisherman's wife had her wish. //

Into this season that has gone over the top in our world – desires and wish lists; over spending and debt,
unrealistic expectations driven by discontent, over the top decorating and overindulgence,
family conflicts and exhaustion – into this season ...

quietly, without fanfare, in mystery and wonder the church again tells the story of a baby –

born of Mary, loved by Joseph, born to save us from our sins – Emmanuel - God with us.

In fact, the Bible tells us again and again - when God is about to do something great – a baby is born.

God chose Abraham to be the father of many nations - Abraham trusted and followed

– Isaac was born of Sarah in her old age – she and Abraham had descendants as many as the stars!

God came to the rescue of his people in slavery in Egypt – in spite of the murderous hand of the Pharaoh -

Moses' mother saved him by putting him in a basket on the river so that he would live

and grow to lead his people to freedom in the promised land!

And to Zechariah and Elizabeth – in their old age, after Elizabeth was thought to be barren –

John – who would one day be called John the Baptist – was born –

a voice crying out in the wilderness – ‘prepare the way of the Lord!!’

And finally – God chose Mary to bear His very own Son into the world - and Joseph to protect her,

to love her son, to name him Jesus – for He was born to save His people from their sins!!

It is hard for us to understand why God acts in this way ... we humans expect waving banners, massive ad
campaigns, cheering crowds, and fanfares of trumpets to announce that something great is happening.

The birth of a baby is so ordinary, so humble, so weak ...yet so profoundly miraculous, power-filled and new!

A wise person said it this way: “Into a world of strength &pride a child is born, weak & humble, having
no power -except that power which alone can conquer all others: Love. Such was & is Christmas.”

Love came down at Christmas time – the master of the sun came and identified with His people -PAGE 3

Let us not forget what it cost Jesus to come to earth as one of us. The Almighty God, Creator and King of the Universe, gave up his heavenly throne, gave up being worshipped and adored by angels and saints, in order to come to us and to give us heaven. Yet that is not all He gave –

Greater love has no one than this - that they lay down their life for their friends.

This is the love of Christmas - God laid aside his throne - and in Jesus became one of us, like us in every way: - and being one of us he further humbled himself and gave his life for us.

In the face of this incredible and beautiful and sobering news there can be only one response: to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength; and to love one another – in the way that he loves us.

After all, it is only the love of God that finally brings to us the hope and the peace, the contentment and the joy that we need and that we need to share!

As you finish your preparations for Christmas,

keep this paraphrase of St. Paul's words from 1 Corinthians in your heart.

If I decorate my house perfectly with plaid bows, strands of twinkling lights and shiny balls,

but do not show love to my family, I'm just another decorator.

If I slave away in the kitchen, baking dozens of Christmas cookies, preparing gourmet meals and arranging a beautifully adorned table at mealtime, but do not show love to my family, I'm just another cook.

If I work at the soup kitchen, carol in the nursing home and give all that I have to charity,

but do not show love to my family, it profits me nothing.

If I trim the spruce with shimmering angels and crocheted snowflakes, attend a myriad of holiday parties and sing in the church choir but do not focus on Christ, I have missed the point.

Love stops the cooking to hug the child. Love sets aside the decorating to kiss the spouse.

Love is kind, though harried and tired. Love doesn't envy another's home

that has coordinated Christmas china and table linens.

Love doesn't yell at the kids to get out of the way.

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Love doesn't give only to those who are able to give in return, but rejoices in giving to those who can't.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

Video games will break, necklaces will be lost, golf clubs will rust. But giving the gift of love will endure.

The gift of love will endure. Indeed - that is what Christmas is all about.

The gift of love – Jesus - come down at Christmas. AMEN