

I've been joking that the only good thing about having Christmas without my dad for the first time this year is that we don't have to get him a gift. He was notoriously difficult to buy for. He just didn't want things. Clear back when we were kids, we used to ask our parents, "What do you want for Christmas this year?" They would answer, "Good children." Of course the 6 of us kids thought our parents had that gift already.

Almost everyone has someone it's hard to buy for. Will they like this gift? We want to please the people we love, but we don't know if we can.

Imagine one of the names on your shopping list is God. What will you get God this year? What can you get for someone who owns everything?

King David unified the tribes of Israel and set up a palace for himself in Jerusalem; he enjoyed being king. He won the respect of nations because he was a skillful politician and commander, even though he was not a perfect moral leader. David was ancient Israel's Bill Clinton.

In today's first reading he sits in his splendid palace. He sees the cloth tent over the ark of the covenant, and he tells his prophet Nathan, "This isn't right. Here I am living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God dwells in a tent!" David decided to get God a gift. He would build a temple for the ark. But that night God appeared to Nathan the prophet, saying, "Tell David to forget it. I am in charge. I took you from the pasture. I have been with you wherever you went. And I will make you famous." Nathan tells David God will establish a house for him. "I will raise up your heir. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. Your house shall endure forever."

David was ready to get God a gift, but God didn't want it. It didn't seem like a bad idea, but sometimes God doesn't think much of our ideas. And we do not always do a good job with our ideas. We want a good country, but we keep veering off course. The supreme court hears arguments favoring the burning of crosses. The senate majority leader steps down over insensitive words. We want other nations as allies, but we do not trust them enough to limit our arsenal and develop structures for peace.

David wanted to do God a favor, but God had a better solution and a wider promise. The extent of that promise became evident with the birth of Jesus at Christmas.

When Christmas arrives, you may want to do something for God, something you think is a great idea. Maybe it is. Maybe it's not. But the message of Christmas is that God knows all the great ideas. And God will give you a gift, greater than you could ever imagine.