



**“It’s for You!”**

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Hayward, California***

***December 24, 2010  
Luke 2: 1-20 (NRSV)***

This past Tuesday, a little angel named Braedon Reuling, and his grandmother, Pam Reuling, came to visit at the church office. Brandon is about three years old. He lives with his parents in the Seattle area, but he and his dad were in the East Bay the past few days visiting Grandma and Grandpa, Pam and Ed, for the holidays. His grandparents are members of Eden Church.

Even though Braedon lives far away, he is beginning to recognize a few of us around the church. He and his dad visited this past summer, and were at Eden this past Sunday for the Live Nativity. So even though he’s young and lives far away from us, Braedon’s beginning to have repeat experiences here at Eden and to recognize a few of us as being part of his universe.

Pedro and I met Braedon and Pam at the office door, just as we were finishing a brief rehearsal for tonight’s service, and as Braedon and Pam were coming into the office. We could see from the Reulings’ purposeful strides and armload of gifts that they were on a mission.

As I bent down to welcome Braedon to Eden Church, he reached out his right hand and pressed a gift up to my face, and he said with the kind of enthusiasm that only a three-year old could muster, “Here, it’s for you! I made it for you! Merry Christmas!”

The “it” was a single Christmas cookie in the shape of a train.

Grandma Pam explained that it was a Thomas the Tank Engine<sup>1</sup> cookie. (Braedon is a huge fan.)

For the uninitiated, Thomas the Tank Engine is the main character featured in a series of 20<sup>th</sup> century British children’s stories authored by Wilbert and Christopher Awdry. The character has also become associated with a whole line of children’s toys and assorted accoutrements.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.thomasandfriends.com/usa/Thomas.mvc/About>

I suspect that cookie baking and Christmas present delivering was Grandma's idea. But I could see from examining Braedon's gift that the decorating was entirely his inspiration.

This is because grandmothers use discrete amounts of sprinkles that reflect a mindfulness about the cost of sugar, and the number of people whom one is baking for; but three-year-olds tend to focus on their individual masterpieces and their thoughts are much more generous than those of adults, so that they shake great gobs of sprinkles onto their cookies, which is what Braedon had done with his gift for me.

After presenting his cookie to me, Braedon turned to Pedro and reached out his left hand, and repeated the same gesture that he had made toward me. Braedon pressed his other cookie in Pedro's direction, and said, "Here, it's for you! Merry Christmas!"

Pedro was appropriately grateful, but soon became concerned that Braedon's gift might have been intended for someone else on the staff.

He whispered to me, "I'm not sure that I should accept. Maybe it was meant for someone else."

I thought for half a second about Pedro's question, looked at Braedon, and said, "No. Look at his face. He wants you to have it."

"OK," Pedro said, "then I accept."

As I reflected on our angelic visitors, the thought occurred to me that so many of us, even lifelong churchgoers, have moments when we wonder whether God's ultimate Christmas gift was meant for us.

In the global scheme of things, we note the contrast between the world as it is—riddled with wars, injustices, and privations—and the world as God intended it.

Some of us are celebrating Christmas far away from loved ones who are stationed in the military, the Peace Corps, or mission posts in war-torn and impoverished nations.

Others are celebrating Christmas far from our homeland and loved ones, and are separated by arbitrary national borders and racist immigration laws.

Given these and other circumstances, we may wonder whether Christmas was truly meant for everyone.

In our private lives, many succumb to idealized views of what our lives should be like and how we ought to be spending our holidays. We feel incompetent because we cannot provide more gifts for our children. We fret over changes in our physical appearance. We question whether our Christmas dinner will turn out right, whether a

certain member of the family can stay sober through the holidays, and whether our family can make it through a Christmas gathering without starting World War III.

Many experience hardships and losses of various sorts. Some are unemployed. Others are underemployed. Still others have too much to do.

Some are encroaching upon Christmas without a partner. Some are separated. Some are divorced, some are widowed, and some ardently searching for a soul mate.

Some endure grueling hours caring for sick or frail loved ones. Others anticipate a diagnosis or a prognosis filled with doom. Still others live with a terminal illness, and others are even now preparing for a family funeral.

Some are plagued by mental illness and find the dark days of winter particularly difficult. They question the meaning and value of their lives, while their loved ones strive to empathize and encourage, and question how to stay in a relationship with someone who is profoundly troubled, and still maintain their own sense of wellbeing.

Regardless of our circumstances, most of us have at one time or another questioned whether the gift of Christmas was meant for us. It is especially in these times that God wants us to hear and believe that Christmas was truly meant for us.

I think that this is why God sent Christmas wrapped in the package of a little child. I think God knew that everyone needed to hear the Christmas message through the emphatic voice and earnest look of a child who, like Braedon, says, "It's for you! I made Christmas for you! Merry Christmas!" Amen.