

It's Christmas—and we're going to a wrapping party! Not a musical rapping, but a wrapping of presents! Here we are on Christmas Eve. Over the last few days we've probably wrapped many presents as we prepared gifts to be given to loved ones. Let's wrap ourselves now around a simple message in today's gospel—wrap and be wrapped. Mary wrapped Jesus in a simple cloth and Jesus, being a baby, allowed himself to be wrapped in it. Imagine how Jesus felt to be wrapped in the warm, protective, nourishing waters of Mary's womb and then to be wrapped in a simple blanket, to feel Mary's loving touch and the warmth of the cloth. It makes me think of when our daughter Tahra was born. We immediately came to know how sensitive she was to the cold—she was definitely the loudest of our 3 children as she emerged. Yet as soon as they wrapped a blanket around her and placed her in a warming tray, she stopped crying. Tahra was the picture of contentment! Perhaps Jesus was, too! The message of wrapping and being wrapped, however, is not only for babies—it is the journey of a lifetime. Together let us move into our wrapping party as we consider a few examples.

The 1st illustration includes some December happenings. Mother nature has wrapped us in her blanket of snow a few times. This wrapping gifted us with beauty and fun, and yet it also caused us to change our plans and gave us a few fits on the highways. Momma nature wrapped us; we in turn were invited to wrap others with her beauty through our words or playfulness, wrap others with care as they needed it. We also are invited to allow others to embrace us with that same playfulness and care. In December we have also been wrapped in Christmas music, beautiful light displays, and decorations of many types. Depending on its style, the music wraps us in excitement, reflection, or tears. The decorations envelop us in wonder and beauty. In sharing these experiences, we wrap others with those same gifts. These experiences of wrapping and being wrapped are Christmas gifts—enfleshments of God's love—we can give all year long.

The 2nd example reaches across the miles. This past fall Mary Ryan, a woman from South Africa, came to the United States to be ordained a deacon in the Roman Catholic Womenpriests Community. A few days before we met in person, I spoke with Mary on a conference call. She told us that she couldn't wait to look into our eyes. When she said this, I felt her look into my heart and see me with eyes of compassion and love. Already Mary was lovingly embracing me. When I met her for the 1st time on the day of her ordination, she immediately wrapped me in her gentle spirit, strong sense of purpose, and deep spirituality. I felt a connection of the heart from the start. Although we are continents apart, our strong emotional tie has continued to grow. Recently when Nelson Mandela died, many in our region offered her our condolences and wrapped her and her country in prayer. She responded with an email that wrapped tightly around my heart. She shared that 40 years ago she and her husband had to hide their banned reading material about Mandela and the African National Congress; as I read this, my heart was wrapped in the horror and pain of their oppression. The day he was released after 27 years in prison, Mary—who is white—and her teaching colleague—who is a black woman—were able to celebrate freedom together for the 1st time. She went on to say: “I am so grateful to have lived at this time—to have both known apartheid and its evil effects and then to taste something of what liberation has meant.” Mary's words enveloped my heart in joy and gratitude for what her country has been able to achieve thus far and for Mary's deep commitment to justice, understanding, and rising above differences. Because Mary and others did what they could to bring about change, their countrymen and women became wrapped in greater freedom. Through her authenticity and openness Mary gave me an early Christmas present wrapped in God's love, and I offer that gift to you in the hope you, too, will be embraced in that Love.

The last example is simple one that I experienced over 50 years ago. When I was about 5 years old, I was wrapping a gift while my mother, who is now deceased, was talking on the phone. I didn't know how to wrap at that point and cut the paper to the size of the bottom of the box, leaving no paper to wrap around the gift! My mom interrupted her phone conversation a couple times to help me in my frustration. On the 3rd try she cut yet another piece of paper and showed me how to use the larger piece to completely surround the gift. Over the years I have marveled at her patience. She could have let me have it for interrupting her a few times—but she didn't. My mom wrapped me in loving patience and a deep heart love, enfleshing the words of 1 Corinthians “Love is patient. Love is kind.” I also felt embraced in a teaching moment. By allowing me to learn by doing, she patiently taught me how to wrap. Some wrappings never leave us. I never would have thought this simple experience would continue to stay me with all these years and speak to me in deeper ways. Yet it has and continues to be a gift that keeps on giving. Perhaps enfleshments of real Love are always with us.

In each of our wrapping party examples we find that Love is not bound by time or place. It is immediate, it stretches across the miles, and it continues to live on even when rooted in the distant past. When we wrap others and others wrap us in playfulness, creativity, care, authenticity, a sense of justice, patience, and heart love, we en flesh divine Love—what Christmas is all about.

As we celebrate Christmas, we have a special opportunity as Christians to feel and rejoice in the wrap of God's love through this community here, through our family and friends, and through Jesus who enfleshed God's Love so completely and continues to embrace us in that Love.

So wrap and be wrapped in Love—the Gift of Christmas.

Scripture readings—Christmas Eve

Isaiah 9: 1-6

A Reflection on the Incarnation from *A Tree Full of Angels* by Macrina Wiederkehr p. 147 (adapted CCJ)

Luke 2: 1-14