

## ***GIVING AT CHRISTMAS***

Well, I suppose Christmas 2006 will be typical for the 21<sup>st</sup> century – busy parking lots and malls, family meals, lighted trees and yards – those new blow-up yard thingies – and more busy parking lots. Oh yea, and let's not forget the giving of gifts!

Television news tells us that shopkeepers may be disappointed this season if they expect Christmas shopping to account for as much as one-third of their annual sales. It's not looking good, economically speaking, that is.

Don't you just love it when people say, "We're broke! We spent all our money on vacation last summer, and now there's nothing left for Christmas!" or "There won't be Christmas at our house this year! We can't afford it!" Funny, how they can have Christmas without Jesus, God, and their Church family, but not without money.

I have to wonder who or what exactly is driving this Christmas-giving thing. Why is it that we give anyway? Do we give because we have to, because of what we might get in return, or because we like to make others happy? After all, Proverbs 19 says "Everyone is the friend of a man who gives gifts." Could this be the origin of gift giving?

We all know the Wise Men brought gifts to the baby Jesus, and the Jewish holiday, Hanukah is also richly steeped in this gift-giving tradition. But no matter what the origin of giving is, the fact remains that giving at Christmas is a big part of our celebration.

I think the book of Luke, chapter 6, says it best: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back...Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

As one scholar put it, "The kind of giving that has a reward connected with it is not giving but **forgiving**... It's about returning good for bad, blessing for curse, and prayer for abuse." So "give and it will be given to you" isn't about presents, but rather **forgiveness**.

This Christmas, amidst the shopping at malls, busy parking lots, lights and blow-up yard thingies, be sure that **forgiveness** is on your list of things to give away.

May God richly bless you and your loved ones this blessed Christmas Season, and help you all to keep your hearts focused on the greatest gift of all.