

Christmas at the Mall, by Dottie Escobedo-Frank

Taken from *Igniting Worship: Advent & Christmas Services & Video Clips on DVD*

Have you been to the mall lately? I know you have! I was there the other day and I noticed Christmas has landed right there in Arrowhead Mall. There was a line to meet Santa Claus. There was the Christmas music overhead. There was red and green everywhere. It was a beautiful sight! But, I noticed some of the people looked a little harried. In fact, some of them looked so tired you just knew they wanted to run home, wrap up in a blanket with a cup of hot chocolate, and “veg” in front of the fireplace. One couple with a list in their hands was arguing about spending money. They yelled at each other, walked forward a little ways, and then stopped and argued some more. As I watched them from a distance, I wondered how Christmas had come to this.

If you read the messages at the mall you might have a certain idea about what Christmas is all about. You might think it is about materialism and about spending money for those you love. You might even think money can buy love. By the look of anxiety on everyone’s faces, you also might think it hurts to love. Or you might think Santa Claus is the true meaning of Christmas. You might think one of the things we learned as children is how to ask for more. You might, like the daughter in *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, ask the question, “Doesn’t this seem like a bit much?”

We start Christmas with good intentions. We want to show people we love them and we want to surprise them with gifts that will make their hearts go pitter-patter. But then something happens. It starts with TV commercials. Commercials give us ideas about what others want for Christmas and what is out there to buy. They give us the ideas that anyone can show great love by giving great gifts. So, the expectation to spend more than we can afford begins to increase. We go to the mall and we see everyone else loaded down with gifts, and we think that is what we have to do as well. Our money runs out, and our credit cards run up. Before we know it, we find ourselves in a pickle every January when we open our bills.

The Wise Folk brought gifts to the Savior of the world. They came giving the best of themselves. The journey was long as they followed the star that brightened the sky. They knew this special birth would change the world, and they wanted to be there to give honor and to give gifts. They gave gold (representing their material possessions), frankincense (representing death), and myrrh (representing healing). They gave of their best and it took a long time for them to present the gift to the Savior. They didn’t just go to the mall and purchase something little. They looked to their lives to find a gift and went on a distant journey to give the best gift they could think of.

What is the best gift you could ever get? Is it a diamond or a Lexus? Is it a trip to an exotic country? Is it a credit line paid in full? Is it a new house? What is it your heart longs for?

Maybe for some of you it is more time spent with the family you love. Maybe it is peace on earth. Perhaps it is peace in your family. Or maybe you long for a mate, or a boyfriend, or a friend. If you could ask for anything at all, what would it be?

There was a little boy who was five years old. His mom took him to the mall around Christmastime. Now, mom was raised in church, but she had gotten out of the habit of attending church over the years, and so this little boy had not been raised to know the stories of the faith. So at the mall, he saw a nativity set in a picture window. He turned to his mom and said, "Mom, who is that baby?" Mom said, "Why, that's baby Jesus!" And then the little boy said, "Mom, who is baby Jesus?" Mom was appalled as she realized her little boy had now way to know about baby Jesus because he hadn't heard the stories she grew up knowing. This family faithfully attended church after this, and the little boy came to find out who baby Jesus was and what Christmas was really all about.

God's greatest gift to us was Jesus. Jesus the baby entered into our universe so we could know God loved us so much. God would go the distance for our love. There's no greater gift. There's no better way to celebrate Christmas than to move from the mall to the manger.