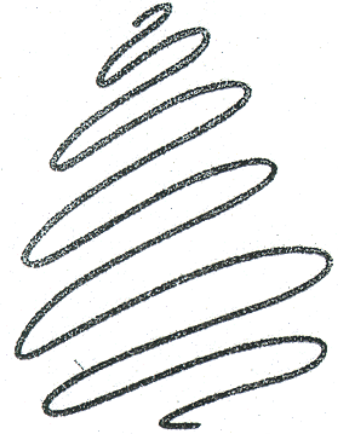


S HOPPING FOR THE PERFECT GIFT!

But what do you buy for the person who has everything?
And what do you buy for the person who has nothing?

Hand-made cigars, hand-crafted coffee, perfume, electronic gadgetry
aromatherapy oils, a strand of fake pink poils,
thick-as-a-brick pockmarked high density fruit cake
a va-va-voom skimpy dress, gourmet foods yule love to *fre ss* ("eat")
leather accessories, cashmere, silk or fur
chocolates, diamonds, gold, frankincense and myrrh
books, wine, micro-brews, objets d'art
bread/ice cream/espresso makers, or a Cuisinart®
a set of three hand-milled Provence lavender soaps
an empty card in a gold foil-lined envelope...
And just in case someone's miffed and whines and hollers
hole-in-the-head gifts are priced under twenty dollars.
You can always bargain hunt and buy your gifts at a store
that's been going out of business for twenty years or more.



N AUGHTY OR NICE? MOSTLY NAUGHTY!

The truth is most of us have way too much, but typically want more. That's only human, we argue. We'll quickly turn evergreen with envy if others buy, give, and get better goodies. That's naughty, and also very predictably human. 2,000 years ago Someone who knew all about our incessant cravings and tireless acquisitiveness, who understood our chintzy charity and stinginess toward others, warned that *our real life in no way depends upon the number of our possessions.*

A GIFT SIMPLY OUT OF THIS WORLD

That Someone was none other than Jesus, God's perfect gift to a far-from-perfect world that is still chock full of ornery, naughty sinners. Jesus told it straight: *What good is it for a man to gain the whole world at the price of his real life? What could a man offer to buy back his soul once he has lost it?*

T HE NECESSARY INTANGIBLE: YOURS FOR THE ASKING

This year more than a secure job and an improved economy, we have come to value peace...the other stuff of life that can't be boxed up and gift wrapped. We don't need a for-fun *tc ho tch ke* (a little something gift); we don't need a big-bucks, impress-your-friends present as much as we need the gift of eternal life: *For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him should not be lost, but should have eternal life. God has not sent his Son into the world to pass sentence upon it, but to save it—through him.*