

Sunday 21 December 2008  
Sermon notes  
[www.usbc.org/sermons](http://www.usbc.org/sermons)

© USBC – [www.usbc.org.uk](http://www.usbc.org.uk)

**Carols by Candlelight 2008 - The Gift of Hope**  
**Rev. David Blandford, Senior Pastor at USBC Swindon**

Christmas gifts - now of course there are a number of popular toys for this Christmas. *Nintendo Wii and Wii Fit, Xbox 360, Ipods* in a whole rainbow of fun colours.

The top boys toy is Dr Who –12" Supreme Dalek which has automated head and eye movement a poseable gun arm, and Dalek phrases. Exterminate presumably being one of them. Not a lot of hope there then.

The next is a little more hopeful

**Baby Born with Magic Potty – now that could be useful and certainly anyone with a baby could find the magic baby really helpful.**

Well its not always easy to work out what gifts to give at Christmas. In reality if we could have whatever we wanted we could get some truly amazing things.

***Video clip – Miss Congeniality Scene 19***

When a serial killer indicates that his next target is the Miss United States beauty pageant, the F.B.I. decides that they must get an undercover agent as a participant in the contest. Sandra Bullock plays that character. Here she is being asked about what really matters to her.

World Peace - World peace just seemed a great line for the undercover cop to come out with. Yet world peace would be amazing.

If you could have anything you'd like for Christmas what would it be?. World peace would be amazing – in fact it would be miraculous. The question would be how long would it, could it last?

If I could have anything at all then I would ask for heaven on earth. Could that would bring peace and so much more. Yet our world is not heaven on earth. Yet there are signs of Heaven, there are signs of hope.

The Big Issue magazine creates a way forward to provide an income for the homeless and vulnerably housed people. I was interested to read about the hopes that two of the vendors of the Big Issue had two of their vendors describing their hopes in the [latest issue which you can find online](#) or, better still,

buy for yourself from a street vendor. Big Issue vendor Sam says she hopes to work really hard on her Open University degree in 2009. And that happiness is "being around people you love and being content in yourself". Eddie says he doesn't want anything for Christmas himself, just to be sure that his six year-old daughter is safe and happy. As long as his daughter is happy he is alright. Eddie is HIV positive so doesn't know how long he has left.

Well you'll understand that Microsoft's Bill & Melinda Gates are not poverty stricken - but what is so good is that they want to use their fortune to bring hope to the world.

"More than a decade ago, the two of us read an article about the millions of children who were dying every year in poor countries from diseases that were long ago eliminated in this country. One disease we had never even heard of—rotavirus—was killing literally half a million kids each year. We thought: That's got to be a typo. If a single disease were killing that many kids, we would have heard about it, because it would have been front-page news. But it wasn't a typo.

We couldn't escape the brutal conclusion that—in our world today—some lives are seen as worth saving and others are not. We said to ourselves: "This can't be true. But if it is true, it deserves to be the priority of our giving."

We sent the article to Bill's father, Bill Gates Sr., with a note attached that said, "Dad, maybe we can do something about this." And he helped us get started.

We created the Gates Foundation in 2000 because we believe in the principle that every human life has equal worth. The life of an impoverished child in a developing country is as precious as the life of a middle-class kid in a developed one. A family struggling to make ends meet in an American inner city matters as much as a family thriving in a safe, suburban neighborhood. Today, billions of people never even have the chance to live a healthy, productive life. We want to help all people get that opportunity.

A bus full of children can be a sign of hope. This bus is full of children who live on the streets of Kolkata they are of to a mobile school where they will receive basic education and a good meal. I

There are signs of hope in our world. It's not heaven but its places where some of the values of heaven are breaking through.

Last week I was driving down Meadowcroft when I saw an ambulance. What do you think when you see an ambulance. Well it is a sign of hope but it also suggests that there is some urgent need for an ambulance to be called.

The reality is that Jesus is the gift of hope supreme. The Gift of God coming to earth came about because the situation that humanity was facing without God would have been hopeless.

One of our readings talked of Jesus not holding onto his rights in heaven as the Son of God but letting go of them in order to become the baby at Bethlehem and there in this animal feeding trough, in the shed/stable laid the the gift of hope personified, in relative obscurity.

A baby yet a boy born to be our Saviour – because the world needs saving. Consider – Zimbabwe where there is total disregard for human need, consider India and the bombings in Mumbai, consider the Congo with 1 million displaced persons. Consider the UK where we have homeless on our streets, consider England where our hospitals have lots of people unwell.

Yes I would like a world, where there is total goodness, where creativity is released, where everyone is loved and is significant, where there is no suffering, no disasters , no wars no killings no robberies no violations.

I 'd gladly give up present of a wet suit if I could change it for that and the Christmas dinner and the chocolate and the... , The reality is that you can have all the trimmings and yet live without hope and purpose .

The staggering truth is God in the baby Jesus left heaven where it is totally good and became one with us and even then as an infant Herod the so called King of the Israel tried to kill him. Jesus born supernaturally to a virgin – Mary, Jesus nurtured by Joseph her husband to be. Jesus who came not only as one of us but came not even as a servant but as a slave –very evocative language but what the bible is saying is that when God left heaven and became the baby Jesus then he was willing to put himself totally at God's disposal, to do whatever was necessary to bring heaven to earth. Not totally, not all at once but heaven came to earth in Jesus.

**Jesus is God's big gift of hope.** Jesus is the one who can bring heaven, who can change us on the inside; he is the one who can guide nations how to live. He does that through his life and his death when he takes the sin, the evil, the wrongdoing of the world into his very being taking our punishment, our blame and in turn releasing forgiveness and hope and new life.

For the Bible reminds us that Jesus is no longer the baby, nor is the one hanging on a cross , but he is the Lord , he is the king of Kings, we celebrate his birth because he lives and because he continues to give the gift of hope. Heaven is going to come totally to earth. Yet as with any gift the gift has to be received as John the disciple who was closest to Jesus wrote

**12** Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

We can be part of bringing this gift of hope to others – it begins as we welcome Jesus into our lives, our hearts, our homes, our communities. It is in discovering that Jesus that the truth source of hope is found and then we too can be channels of hope to the world in which we live.