

**BE ALERT,
BE ALERT,**

so that you will be able to recognize your Lord
in your husband, your wife,
your parents, your children,
your friends, your teachers,
but also in all that you read
in the daily newspapers.

The Lord is coming, always coming.
Be alert to his coming. When you have ears to
hear and eyes to see, you will recognize him
at any moment in your life. **Life is Advent;**
life is recognizing the coming of the Lord.

Henri Nouwen

Tis the
Season to Turn
Everything
UPSIDE DOWN

Second Sunday of Advent • December 8, 2013

PEACE

HOPE

JOY

LOVE

Simply
Christmas



At St.
Augustine



You are a Christian only

so long as you
look forward to a new world,
so long as you
constantly pose critical questions
to the society you live in,
so long as you
emphasize the need of conversion,
both for yourself and for the world,
so long as you
stay unsatisfied with the status quo
and keep saying that a
new world is yet to come.

You are a Christian only

when you believe that
you have a role to play
in the realization of this new kingdom, and
when you urge everyone you meet
with a holy unrest to make haste
so that the promise might soon be fulfilled.
So long as you live as a Christian
you keep looking for a new order,
a new structure,
a new life.

Henri Nouwen

Christmas Presence

Ask people to reflect on their favorite Christmas memory and they never talk about presents.

They talk about people. Try it. Ask the person sitting next to you, "Tell me about your all-time best, most satisfying Christmas," and then sit back and listen. See, what did I tell you? They never talk about presents. They talk about people. It's not the gift we cherish, it's the giver. The best Christmas gift you can give to someone is you—your time, your attention, your presence.

This Christmas, give yourself. Go on a date with your spouse, just the two of you. Take your child to a basketball game. Visit a friend. Take your elderly Dad out for breakfast. The simple gift of yourself—your undivided attention—is the best gift you have to give. **What we want most at Christmas is not presents, but presence.**

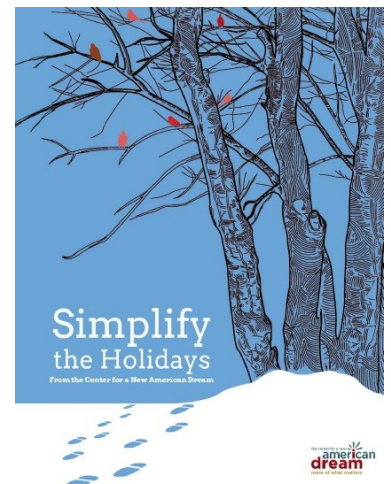
When you read the biblical story of the Magi with the throttle of your imagination wide open, you can almost see them traveling across the desert on their silent, plodding

camels, following that star up in the sky.

The one fact about the Magi that always gets overlooked is that, more than giving gold, incense, and myrrh, they gave themselves. They presented themselves as an act of homage. They "bowed down and worshiped him." The Wise Men didn't send emissaries. They came in person. The gold, incense, and myrrh are incidental details. The thrust of the story is that the Magi presented themselves.

When you think about it, that's what Christmas is all about in the first place—God giving the gift of himself. To show his love for the world, God does not send a gift. Rather, God is the gift. "You shall call his name Emmanuel," said the angel to Joseph, "which means 'God with us.'" Christmas is all about presence—God with us, and we with each other.

By Louis Lotz. Adapted from Simple Living Works. Used by permission. Creative Commons. For more ideas to simplify your life, visit SimpleLivingWorks.org.



The Center for a New American Dream's "Simplify the Holidays" booklet offers practical tips for reducing stress and increasing your personal fulfillment during this holiday season.

Download a free copy at SimplifyHolidays.org.