

GIVE... ME FIRE!

Clement Yeung

It was Christmas eve. A nearby church was hosting a musical presentation entitled: "Celebrate the Season of Light". The conductor was quite well-known, and some of the choir members were professional musicians who had previously performed on television. After supper, my whole family headed for the church with great anticipation.

The evening featured a structured retelling of the Christmas story that consisted of Bible readings, drams and choral interludes. The congregation was invited to join in the singing of familiar Christmas carols at various times. Candles of contrasting colors were assigned to different characters for their symbolic value: angels with yellow candles in crystal holders, shepherds given green candles in wooden holders, wise men having purple candles in brass holders, Mary and Joseph both carrying blue candles with simple holders, Jesus with a white candle in a transparent glass holder.

The old Victorian style church building, complete with a built-in pipe organ and hardwood floor provided exceptional acoustics for the magnificent music.

At the end of the program, each person was given a candle. Actually it was only half a candle stick placed inside a simple aluminum foil collar. As we were singing the last Christmas carol with the lights dimmed, an usher came and lit the candle closest to the aisle. Then the burning candle would light the next candle and so on. After our own candle was lit, we would pass the flame to the next person.

I found the ritual very meaningful. We first need to receive light before we can share it with others. While I was still trying to appreciate all of this, the master of ceremony requested that we blow out the candles before walking out into the cold night. I suppose that was done for fire safety, but it was terribly anticlimactic.

"So often we blow out our candles right before we leave the church, figuratively speaking. No wonder we have no impact on the world around us!" I mumbled to myself. "What good does it do if we only shine for God within in the four walls of the church building?"

As a sign of protest, I kept my candle burning, although I had to take some extra precaution to avoid potential accidents.

As we approached our car, my candle was still burning but the flame was becoming dim. By the time I got into the car, I had no choice but to blow out the candle.

"My candle is no longer burning but Lord, keep me shining for You." It was a silent but sincere plea.

While driving home, I turned on the cassette player in the car. The cassette tape was playing "Shine Jesus shine...", which is a favorite chorus for many people and I often sing along with the tape.

However, that night the words bothered me. The command from Jesus was very clear. "You are the light of the world...let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (*italics added*). With the contemporary chorus, we pray that Jesus

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would shine. But Jesus' light is not shown through a vacuum. He would shine only if we show our light before men. We are His instruments.

The following Sunday, our church service included a special children's musical program. The theme was "Shine for Jesus". A group of children were given brightly colored candles. The candles were lit just before the children stepped up onto the platform to sing in front of the whole congregation. As the children were waiting to take

their positions on the platform, one girl suddenly noticed that the flame of her candle had disappeared. In a panic, she shouted to the teacher, "Give me fire!" Since there was a microphone close to her, those frantic words were heard loud and clear by the whole congregation.

In order to shine for Jesus, we need to utter the same prayer. "Give me fire!" Without heavenly fire, nothing would shine. X'mas would never become Christmas. ♣

THE PERFECT GIFT

By Thomas H. Woo

During Christmas time, many of us went out and searched for a perfect gift to be given to a family member, a relative, or a friend. A perfect gift should not only make the recipient feel pleased, it should make the giver feel good. Instead, our search became time-consuming and often frustrating. Meanwhile, merchants were annoyingly anxious to entice you into their stores.

In a small suburban town adjacent to Washington, DC, for example, a stretch of road of approximately ten miles is supersaturated with shopping centers. It has a total of thirty-two shopping centers, each offering anything and everything that money can buy—from the least expensive to the most expensive. This year, for those who have it all, an upscale department store offered a sterling silver computer mouse. It was priced slightly more than three thousand dollars. Wow, what a mouse! I am sure some people would have bought them only for appearance's sake and for prestige. After all, the value of silver in the metal commodity market, at this writing, is approximately seven dollars per ounce, and this

computer mouse contains only a few ounces of silver.

Despite all of the material gifts that were given or received, there is actually only one and only one perfect gift that fits all occasions and pleases everybody. That gift is Jesus Christ. Of course, He is God's Perfect Gift to every one of us. Let's think! Think of all the great and awesome things that have come to you throughout your life through Jesus. They came to you only by His creation and by His grace. Please remember, they are but a slight taste of all good things that are yet to come. Without Him, one exists without a meaningful purpose. Life is empty. The emptiness can be filled immediately with Him, but one must first open your heart and accept Him. No one can force you to accept Him. God can, but He will only let you accept or reject Him at your free will. The choice is purely yours to decide.

I most highly recommend that you accept Him wholeheartedly. Once you accept Him, you have accepted the most perfect gift of all—the gift bought and brought by God Himself for you and me. ♣