

THE GIFT TABLE

Theme Resource Pack
New Year 2025
(4 Jan - 14 Feb)

Introduction

As a new year begins we gather round the gift table ready to discover the gifts God has for us! And while we're there we will also uncover the gifts we ourselves bring to God. Gifts freely given — with no expectation of return — completely transform lives, transform communities, transform the world. Gifts of time, love, compassion and care have the power to save us, sustain us and spur us on. The act of giving a gift opens up a pocket of space and time that did not exist before the gift was given. A gift doesn't maintain the status quo the way a like for like exchange does. Instead it gives the status quo a little nudge! And with enough nudges and enough momentum it can really get spinning!

And it all begins with God who gave us life, who gave us Christ. A chain reaction of giving that began long ago and yet is still felt in every selfless act, every generous gift. As a new year gets underway with Epiphany we will reflect on the gifts we have been given, the gifts we are carrying, and the gifts we have yet to uncover.

Our theme begins with God's incredible gift to humanity — Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God-with-us. We will join the Magi and bring our own gifts to Jesus. Then we will unpack what it means to receive the gift of Baptism. After that we will consider the gift of restoration and how the Bible can be a kind of repair shop — breathing new life into us. In the fourth week we think about "the gift to see ourselves as others see us" as Robert Burns famously wrote in his Scots poem To A Louse. Discipleship — shared life following after Jesus — is a gift of humility and new perspective that reminds us that we are not the centre of our own universe.

Then as the theme gets to its penultimate week it's crunch time, you've got the gift, *and* the gift receipt — what are you going to do with it? How are we bearing the gift of the good news? And then finally as we anticipate Lent we consider the gifts we need for the journey, for the mission ahead!

Weekly Overview

- God's gift — Jesus!
- The gift received — Baptism!
- The gift of restoration — Bible!
- The gift to see ourselves as others see us... — Discipleship!
- The gift receipt — Evangelism!
- Gifts for the journey — Mission!

Format

Rather than running for just January, this theme will run 6 weeks into mid February to take us from Epiphany all the way to Lent when we will begin a new theme. Over the course of 2026 we are going on a journey that we began in Advent 2025 — of coming round the table with God.

Our themes drawn from Revised Common Lectionary and additional readings shape our Daily Worship, live streams and all sorts of other creative things we get up to! Each week runs Sunday - Saturday and each has a series of daily Bible readings and prompts for reflection.

God's gift — Jesus! (Week 1, 4 January)

Introduction: Jesus is God's gift to the world, the divine becoming human, Emmanuel, God-with-us. At Epiphany the Magi brought three distinct gifts to identify Christ as prophet, priest and king. As we gather round the Gift table we rejoice in God's gifts freely bestowed on us that sustain us. As we take a seat at the table we ask: what gifts are we ourselves bringing to Christ this Epiphany?

Setting the scene: A coffee break in a parcel sorting office full of smiling, laughing colleagues.

Seeds to sow: We are just past Christmas which can often bring an excess of gift-giving that can strain our bank balances, living spaces and relationships! January is often a time of renewed clarity and focus and (often short lived) resolutions to clear away the old and change habits. How can a renewed focus on God's generosity help us rediscover the joy at the heart of gift-giving?

1. **John 3: 16 God's gift — Jesus!** Jesus — God moving into our neighbourhood, walking our road, breathing our air, feeling our joy and pain. At the Gift table we discover Jesus — arms wide — a gift joyfully given for each one of us!
2. **Isaiah 60:1-6 The gift of radiance!** God's gifts are not mysterious arcane sigils hidden away in dark corners for the sufficiently holy to uncover — they blaze brightly for the world to see! How are we reflecting the radiance in our lives?
3. **Matthew 2: 1-12 The gift of discernment!** The Magi brought discerning gifts that marked Christ out as prophet, priest, and King. What gifts are we bringing to Christ this year? What do they say about him? And what do they say about us?
4. **Jeremiah 31: 7-14 The gift of gladness!** What are the simple God-given things that we are glad for this year? The things that sustain us, the things that make us sing out?
5. **Psalms 147:12-20 The gift giver!** These ancient words explore the perspective of the divine gift-giver so far beyond our comprehension but not far from our lives.
6. **Psalms 72: 10-14: 18-25 The gift of precious value!** The very blood in our veins is a precious gift. The gifts of God are circulating around our body right now! Consider that in Christ, divine nature met real flesh and blood.
7. **Ephesians 1: 3-14 The gift of adoption!** Jesus welcomes us into this incredible family! The gift of our inheritance is a glorious thing.

The gift received — Baptism! (Week 2, 11 January)

Introduction: Jesus's baptism was a gift that sustained him with the knowledge of God's presence and his own status as a beloved child of God. In the same way the gift of our baptisms sustain us and reminds us that we are also beloved children of God.

Setting the scene: Jesus and John wading out into the Jordan.

Seeds to sow: Have you been baptised? If not is it something you would like to learn more about? If so, what does your baptism mean to you?

1. **Psalm 29 When God speaks, it matters.** Here we feel the magnitude of God's voice. When God speaks over us in Baptism, as we will explore this week, declaring us chosen — this is a voice that causes water to thunder, trees to split and mountains to jump!
2. **Matthew 3:13-17 The gift of baptism!** Jesus — firstborn of creation — cannot baptise himself, for baptism must be a gift. He receives this gift and as he does he opens up baptism for all of us to hear those words — that we too are chosen and delighted in.
3. **Isaiah 42:1-9 Chosen, delighted in, called, sent.** This paradigm of God's servant: chosen-delighted-called-sent is the one Christ followed and we can follow as we emulate Christ.
4. **Acts 10: 34-43 Who Jesus is and what he did.** This reading is a kind of sequel to Isaiah 42: 1-9, Peter attesting to the new thing that has happened, the new thing that has sprung forth!
5. **John 15: 9 A gift that remains.** This gift remains, it cannot be used up/re-gifted. It can be ignored and forgotten but it can never be destroyed. Through all else, it remains, and we can remain in it.
6. **Acts 16: 11-15 The Gift that keeps on giving.** God's gifts are generative... they lead to more gifts. Not given in exchange back and forth but spreading ever outward. In the water of baptism the ripples spread wide as one baptism leads to many more...
7. **Matthew 13: 44-46 The gift treasured.** Some gifts just fall into place and we've just got to go for them! This pearl simply does not compare with what has gone before! Baptism is a gift worth grabbing with both hands!

The gift of restoration — Bible! (Week 3, 18 January)

Introduction: The gift table is a multipurpose table. It's a place where we can gather to eat, but it's also a workshop where the gifts of God can be tenderly and expertly restored, redeemed, renewed. The Bible is a gift that can restore us to our past and refocus us on our future, as it meets us in this current moment.

Setting the scene: Craftspeople restoring treasured heirlooms in a cosy workshop.

Seeds to sow: What are some of the gifts Gods has given humanity that need restoration and renewal?

1. **Psalm 40 The gift table is a restoration table.** The gift table builds us up to stand firm and proclaim! The Bible itself is a gift library.
2. **1 Corinthians 1: 1-9 Not lacking in any gift!** What does it mean to not be lacking in any gift? How do other readings from the Bible help us to read this passage?
3. **Isaiah 49:1-7 A light to the nations!** In a time when political and cultural borders delineated reality to limited spheres of experience — this prophetic and poetic language transcends all that. We live in a world thousands of years later that has got used to thinking globally and internationally — but this outlook has been shaped by biblical principles — this insight that we live on a shared planet with lives bound up in one another — where restoration always has to be a shared project — is itself a gift from God.
4. **John 1: 29-42 Come and see!** What does it mean to see the gift for ourselves? A gift with our name on it! Let's explore how the Bible itself is one means of people 'Coming and seeing' for themselves.
5. **Jeremiah 33: 10-16 The gift of transformation!** Where do we see desolation and where do we long to see cultivation? These words have inspired generations of reformers, how do they inspire us?
6. **Hebrews 2: 14-18 The gift of insight!** God knows how to restore you to yourself because God knows what it is to be human.
7. **Isaiah 43: 18-21 The gift of renewal!** God's gifts do new things! Sometimes we hold on to old gifts and miss the new gifts God would gladly give us. The Bible is a living gift that is ever new to us.

The gift to see ourselves as others see us... — Discipleship! (Week 4, 25 January)

Introduction: This week we think about discipleship, humility and “the gift to see ourselves as others see us” as Robert Burns famously wrote in his Scots poem ‘To A Louse.’

O wad some Power the giftie gie us / to see oursels as ithers see us! / It wad frae mony a blunder free us, (from To A Louse, Burn’s poem puncturing pomposity and vanity).

Discipleship — shared life following after Jesus — is a gift of humility and new perspective that reminds us that we are not the centre of our own universe, we are constellations in a much more exciting one!

Setting the scene: A wee louse up to mischief in the kirk.

Seeds to sow: This weeks marks Burns Day (25th January) in Scotland. Let’s read ‘To a louse’ that inspired this week and share our thoughts on it!

1. **Psalm 27: 1,4-9 The gift of inner strength.** Rather than posturing and jockeying for status to try and convince other people how great we are, we can come to God’s shelter and discover the inner strength we have been given.
2. **Isaiah 9: 1-4 Seeing ourselves.** God’s gifts bring liberation — real social change, not just a shift in spiritual perspective. Jesus the redeemer asks us to really see ourselves and our relationships with one another.
3. **1 Corinthians 1: 10-18 The gift of unity.** Our gifts from God are diverse and unique but they are given for the good of all and are understood in community. God’s gifts are to draw us together, not set us into conflict with one another. A quick glance at church history would suggest this has continued to be and continues to be an issue!
4. **Matthew 7: 24-27 Building our lives on shifting sands.** Shifting sands offer us quick foundations. Not *solid* foundations but *quick* foundations. Lord forgive us in our lives when we ignore your gifts and look for a beachfront property in a highly desirable but highly flood prone postcode...
5. **1 Corinthians 1: 18-31 Accidentally foolish and willingly foolish.** In Robert Burns’ “To a louse’ we see unwitting foolishness, but in Christ we see deliberate foolishness! There’s a difference between looking silly as a result of conceitedness and being silly in a deliberate joyful way!
6. **2 Kings 5: 1-14 “Nae, man!”, says Naaman.** Naaman wants a grand solution to befit his grand status. How often do we reject God’s simple gifts when we would rather a grand complicated one?
7. **Philippians 2: 1-11 The gift of humility.** Discipleship is not a solo pursuit; a closed loop with just us and Jesus. Gift exchanges undermine the transactional relationships of A & B by multiplying ever outwards.

The gift receipt — Evangelism! (Week 5, 1 February)

Introduction: So you are at the gift table, gift-receipt in hand. What are you going to do? The gifts of God are gifts — freely given and freely taken. Do you take the gifts, or look to return them?

How are we bearing the gift of the good news — the message — the gospel?

Setting the scene: A receipt tucked into the corner of a gift bag.

Seeds to sow: What do the words 'evangelism' or 'evangelical' mean to you?

1. **Micah 6 :1-8 Do you do store credit?** You cannot bring a thousand rams to God and expect to earn 'store credit' in heaven. We are not called for the quick work of extravagance but rather the slower work of justice, kindness, and humility. When does our evangelism spill over into 'thousand ram' territory and attempt to accumulate store credit in heaven rather than peace on earth?
2. **Psalm 15 Living WITH God.** God loves you no matter what, but if you want to live *with* God, to walk side by side where God is taking you — steer clear of hypocrisy! Talking the talk requires walking the walk.
3. **Matthew 5: 1-12 Accepting the gift, uncovering blessing.** Are we vividly telling the story of the counter-cultural blessings of God? Are we evangelistic about it?
4. **Malachi 3: 1-4 Refiner's fire.** Sometimes the refining process can leave us searching for the gift receipt! But what happens when we stick with it?
5. **Psalm 84 The gift of trust.** It is in trust that we learn to blossom and grow — as children, as adolescents, as friends, as partners, as employees, as citizens — as the beloved of God.
6. **Psalm 24: 7-10 The gift of looking up!** Sometimes when we have been shuffling around looking at our boots the greatest gift is simply to look up. How are we inviting one another to look up?
7. **Mark 6: 1-6 Rejecting the gift...** The rhetorical questions in verse 2 are echoed throughout history as people find reasons to reject the gift.

Gifts for the journey — Mission! (Week 6, 8 February)

Introduction: As our theme draws to a close and we anticipate Lent we consider the gifts we need for the journey, for the mission ahead of us! And we also take time to reflect that we ourselves are gifts delivered from the gift table — to be salt and light in the world!

Setting the scene: Bags and bags of salt!

Seeds to sow: As a Connect group how can we be salt and light bringing zest and illumination to the world?

1. **Isaiah 58:1-12 The fast that I choose.** It is in our giving that we receive the gifts we need for the journey. It is in feeding others that we are fed, in liberating others that we are freed, in healing others that we are healed.
2. **Psalm 112: The wealth that lasts, the wealth that actually matters.** Changing our perspective — compassion and generosity leads to a fuller life than hoarding and meanness.
3. **1 Corinthians 2:1-16 Understanding the gifts.** The Holy Spirit helps us to live with our gifts and understand them over the years.
4. **Matthew 5: 13-20 We are gifts, we are salt and light!** We ourselves are gifts we are salt and light. And we are practical gifts — to be used! We are not ornaments!
5. **1 Corinthians 12: 1-14 Unity through diversity.** Many gifts, one source, mutual benefit.
6. **Ephesians 4:11-16 Building up the body!** Speaking the truth in love, acting out the gift.
7. **2 Timothy 1: 6-7 Keep fanning the flame!** We leave the gift table empowered to go out in the world — to keep fanning the flame!