I like Santa Claus. Such a jolly good fella. But he keeps me on my tiptoes more than I would like. I mean, do you know what his song says?

You better watch out, you better not cry,  
You better not pout, I’m telling you why,  
Santa Claus is coming to town.

He’s making a list; he’s checking it twice,  
He’s going to find out who’s naughty and nice,  
Santa Claus is coming to town.

He sees you when you’re sleeping,  
He knows when you’re awake,  
He knows when you’ve been bad or good,  
So be good for goodness sake.

Naughty or Nice? On which list do you think Santa has you? Oh, you are on a list alright. Besides watching us while we sleep, Santa Claus keeps track of who has been naughty or nice then he gives gifts to those who have been nice.

So, how many strikes do we get before we are out and put on the naughty list? Right?

I know this is funny and silly, but it is actually meaningful. Think about it. Most of us celebrate Christmas (and live our lives) in accordance with the theology of Santa Claus. For most of us, Christmas is about putting on our Christmas list those people we like and who have been good to us. We can keep track just fine of who has been naughty and nice. Don’t we?

What would you say is the fundamental difference between Jesus Christ and Santa Claus? Besides the obvious that one of them came from heaven to give the gift of life to all and promised to be with us every day of our lives, while the other comes from the North Pole in a sleigh pulled by flying reindeers making an appearance once a year on Christmas Day, the main difference is that while Santa brings gifts to those who have been nice, Jesus is the gift for everyone, no matter who they are or what they have done. I know this is hard to grasp, even more so when someone who has hurt us or we believe is underserving can receive a gift from anyone, much less from Godself.

I will be honest: granted, it is hard to understand how God offers anything much less life to "naughty” people—which includes all of us if we are honest. But, we have a word for that: grace. Here are some Scriptures that explain how Jesus is the gift and what kind of gift he is:

John 1: 14-16, And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth. From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

John 10:10, I have come that [you] may have life, and have it [in abundance.]

In essence, these scriptures speak about how God decided to come to us not because we were nice but because we are loved, and give everyone the gift of life. This gift is not a thing; it is Godself in Jesus. Jesus with us is the gift that gives us life.

How so? By believing in him as our Savior and learning from him as our Master, Jesus gives us hope that there is a better life after this one and show us the way there. By letting Jesus in into our lives, he heals our hearts from all the sadness, pain, suffering, anger, and even hate. By trusting him, he gives us peace in our minds and hearts when everything around us is falling apart. By learning from Jesus, he makes us kind and compassionate so we too can give life to others. And so much more. Jesus is the gift that stays with us and makes our lives progressively good if we believe and follow him.

In contrast with Santa Claus, this gift is not reserved for those who are already living “nice” lives but for everyone who wants to receive it. Are you a black sheep? You can have the gift. Have you lost your way more times than you can count? The gift is for you. Do you think you are unworthy because of your past or what has been done to you? Take the gift.

What a wonderful gift God has given us and what wonderful blessings we can receive if we only open our hearts and accept them by faith. All of us.

My friends, Jesus is the gift that stays with us in every breath, thought, and palpitation of our hearts. He is always there even if we are naughty—just don’t make it a habit.

Here is the invitation: take the gift, welcome Jesus into your life, make him yours—your Lord and Savior. If you have never done so, this Christmas eve, you can accept and unwrap God’s gift to you by turning to Jesus and asking him to be with you and to teach you his way of life.

\*Christmas story with children.