



## Presence not Presents

**Read:** Matthew 1:18-24

Last week, while I was in the mall doing some Christmas shopping, I noticed the children going to sit on Santa's knee. They would climb up on his lap, get a cute photo and proceed to rattle off their Christmas wish list. Later that evening, as I sat down to pray, I found myself doing the same thing. I was bringing my little "wish list" before God and expecting him to "present" me with my desires. There is nothing wrong with presenting our needs to God, but there is more to prayer.

The key to prayer is not "Presents" but rather "Presence". In the Old Testament the Israelites continue to pray for civil independence and a leader who will provide them national autonomy. Instead, God answer their prayers not with the gift of a nation, but with the presence of his Son, Jesus. The same holds true for us. Our prayers are not answered in material ways, but through a relationship with a person, Jesus.

In this week's gospel, God reminds us that he is sending his Son into the world, "Emmanuel...God with us" (Matthew 1:23). Through the Holy Spirit, God conceived and bore a Son in the womb of Mary. He has sent his very presence into our lives. A presence we can encounter in prayer.

The key to good prayer is discovering God's presence. Like any relationships, presence is important. But it takes work. For myself, I try to spend fifteen minutes a day in silent prayer. For the first fourteen minutes my brain is like a hamster on a wheel. Then, slowly, patiently, God's presence begins to emerge from the noise. I am able to focus and encounter God. His presence fulfills the deepest longing of my heart. Prayer, then, is about encountering the presence of God. It takes dedication, but is it the greatest present of all.