

**This or That**  
**"You have a choice."**  
**Isaiah 61:1-3**

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**What Do You Want?**

It came over the email: the annual, *What's on your list?* request from one of our relatives. What *do* I want? It could be the usual items of clothes: some sweaters and shirts, a new Michigan State ball cap to replace the one that's so overused and faded it's turned pea green. I could ask for a tool, some carving knives, some books, or DVD's, or some gadget that's certain to make my kitchen or car or desktop more modern than ever.

What *do* I want?

Even in an age when our households continue to face recession whether the market says so or not, the abundance we live in makes naming what you want for Christmas...

...difficult.

There are too many things to choose from...

while you and I both know there are others in the world that would list things taken for granted here:

food for the family

a cure from a deadly disease we don't even have

a whole day a parent doesn't have to be afraid for the kids.

What's on some lists are things that only God can give:

forgiveness

healing

the mending of a broken heart

salvation and the end of isolation.

### **What You Hang on Your Tree**

First Sunday of Advent: today we've hung the first things on the tree, and they aren't like many ornaments you see most places. Most places you see pretty balls with pictures of snowflakes, porcelain Santas, plastic reindeer and elves, crystal butterflies and shiny words. All my life, I've hung such things on the tree, along with lights and tinsel, strung popcorn and cranberries, and gobs of tin icicles I used to throw by the handful on branches too high for me to reach.

These things we hang are different. They are crosses and other symbols you'd probably only see in churches. Chrismons, they're called. Symbols of Jesus. That's it. That's all you'll see on the trees in the sanctuary.

As if to say that *you have a choice* about what Christmas is going to mean to you.

I love Christmas. Despite the way things sometimes get frantic, and there's every year the pressure to overspend, overeat, over-schedule, and under-sleep, it's still packed with so many traditions I have to keep. I love the smells and the sights and the wonders; and yes, I'm one of those people who dream of a white Christmas every year.

I am a person of the shiny Christmas tree bulbs, as well as the good fruitcake and the mistletoe.

But that's just cultural Christmas.

And in the end, cultural Christmas and getting what's on your list and giving what's on others will never be enough.

In fact, as much as I want to hang on to much of it, Cultural Christmas is not essential.

What is essential is the Holy One who decided to hear the cries of hunger and see the vulnerable ones who shudder with fear.

What is essential is the Holy One who understands what happens to our bodies when they are sick and our souls when they get damaged by affliction or sin.

What is essential is God who knows; and God who has made a promise:

*To bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives and  
release to the prisoners; proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

Advent is promise. It's anticipation for what is to come.

Spiritual Christmas. The Christmas you can't do without. Perhaps we all need a few more chrismons to hang on our trees.

### **Who Do You Need?**

Jesus came for a purpose.

Born in Bethlehem for you and the gifts you really need.

Cultural Christmas...Spiritual Christmas...

Which will be your most important?

As you choose how to keep this season: what do you really need on the top of your list?