

Becoming Stewards: The 4 “B’s” of [Non]Stewardship

What does becoming stewards look like at the intersection of Advent and Christmas Shopping? Don't get me wrong: Christmas Shopping is an important ritual, part of the responsibilities of adulthood, and a rich spiritual exercise. We sift and sort relationships, values, and priorities; we dream about giving and receiving; we surprise others and we surprise ourselves. It doesn't have to be conspicuous consumption and it doesn't have to be a misery of impossible expectations. Christmas Shopping can be part of Advent: both are about expectation, both are about waiting, both are about time, both are about endings and beginnings. The fourth 'B' of becoming stewards that shows up at the intersection of Advent and Christmas Shopping is “Beyond:” beyond stewardship is The Gift.

Beyond Stewardship...

Let's admit it: it takes some practice as stewards to manage our Christmas Shopping lists! Stewardship disciplines are quickly muddled and stewardship restraints disappear if the disciplines of budgeting, making difficult choices, and managing time and resources haven't been a year-long practice. Financial planners help spenders focus on the debt load that waits beyond Christmas in their effort to keep them from going under the Niagara Falls of Christmas desires. But the prospect of pain is easy to anesthetize: we need more wholistic therapy. We need a model of “beyond” stewardship if we are to become stewards. So consider: Mary

Mary the mother of Our Lord is not our first choice of stewardship, and for good reason: her resume of virtues and accomplishments is already crowded without adding “steward extraordinaire.” And I am not actually nominating her for that title! For me, Mary models what is beyond stewardship, she affirms for me that there are things more important than stewardship, matters of faith and life that fall beyond the sphere of stewardship because they are impossible to manage, cannot be planned, only received, or not—like a gift: and then hardly even “not.” Please excuse the phrase: it is inconceivable to imagine Mary refusing the gift of conception, as the angel was already there; and it is not possible to think of Mary as anyone other than the Mother of Our Lord because that is what she becomes when she delivers the baby! These are the matters beyond stewardship that help us become stewards: matters of who we are, who we are becoming as people of faith, hope, and love; matters of God's inexplicable presence in our lives, creating possibilities we hadn't imagined let alone foreseen, and closing doors we dearly wanted opened. We know Mary was a good steward of her body because she birthed a healthy baby in a stable; she was a good steward of her engagement, because she married Joseph despite his doubts; she was a good steward of her life, because she survived the social dangers of pre-marital pregnancy. But what impresses us is that she is Mary, the Mother of our Lord, the young woman who said yes to God's gift that is so far beyond stewardship that we don't even see it on her CV. And I may be completely out of line here—but you've forgiven me once, so hey, here goes—each one of us, though none of us has been gifted by God like Mary, has nonetheless been given incredible gifts by God that impact our identity, the trajectory of our lives, and our eternal hope just like Mary: through the same child she birthed, Jesus the Christ.

Let us pray. O God, your gifts, all your gifts and your greatest gift Jesus, take us beyond stewardship into the wholeness and fullness of eternal life and so we can become stewards of this life and all you give us in this life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen