

Christmas Day – 2023

Isaiah 52:7-10

Hebrews 1:1-12

John 1:1-18

It is inescapable; Christmas and gift go together. How many of y'all can draw to mind the gift you received as a child at Christmas that still makes you smile? How many of y'all can remember the gift that you received at Christmas that evoked a joyful response? A gift is intended to convey the idea that you are special, that you are loved, that you are treasured. Some of us prefer to give rather than to receive. It's all about love, isn't it? It's all about something way more priceless than the gift itself. Except Jesus. He is the gift. He is Love. He is the content of joy and hope and grace and truth and everything, literally everything, that your Father wants to give you.

From eternity, God the Father planned to send His Son into our flesh. Before the eternal God created the heavens and the earth, He envisioned forging a relationship so deep with man that He planned to become a man. The one thing that our Lord is not is superficial. The one thing that our Lord is not is capricious or fickle or hesitant. When God created Adam and Eve, He was intent on establishing and maintaining a connection to His creatures that is predicated on the deepest level, predicated on the most enduring reality. What is that reality? The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). The Father gives His Son. In this is love. This gift elevates the human spirit and makes us more than a biological creature. Isn't that what you want? Isn't that what drives your faith? Haven't you known that being a Christian has made you more than a static creature? Love does that. God's love, in you; it is a catalyst for you loving others, a catalyst for sacrificial behavior, a catalyst for Christ-like self-giving. You have known that beauty; a life above your own working in you to elevate your soul *and elevate those around you* – Christmas love, Christmas gift, Christmas joy.

I'm a fan of the television series *The Chosen*. It's a series that depicts the life of Christ. It takes liberties with the biblical text by creating fictional dialogue but it does so in a faithful manner that gives insight and contour to the apostles and others. One episode centers around Luke 4 and Jesus preaching in His hometown of Nazareth. In the Scripture, Jesus reads a vivid section from the book of Isaiah, a section that alludes to the OT festival of Jubilee, a section that has an unmistakable messianic character. Jesus announces to His hearers that "Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). The townsfolk aren't too happy about this, coming from one they knew as a youth, whose family is just as ordinary as everyone else. In the real account, Jesus gives it to the people of Nazareth pretty good and Luke tells us, "When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath."

What *The Chosen* does with this is priceless. The Rabbi of the synagogue in Nazareth tells Jesus that if He does not renounce His claim to be the Messiah then they will have no choice but to follow the Law of Moses (namely, kill Jesus for blasphemy). Jesus then tells the Rabbi, "I AM the Law of Moses." *That* is Christmas. *That* is "the Word became flesh". *That* is this Divine Service. "In many and various way, God spoke to His people of old by the prophets, but now, in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son" (Hebrews 1:1). When God led His people Israel out of Egypt, He was "in" the pillar of cloud by day and "in" the pillar of cloud by night

(Exodus 13:21). That God of deliverance, that God of the Exodus and new life is that child lying in a manger. When God fed the Israelites who were making their way to the Promised Land with miraculous food, with manna in the desert, that miraculous food is that child lying in a feeding trough in Bethlehem (John 6). I AM the Law of Moses. It is a wonderful line. Jesus said: "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have life; and it is they that bear witness about me" (John 5:39).

The rock that Moses struck, the rock that gushed water in the desert for a thirsty people – the rock was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). When Abraham was to sacrifice his son Isaac at Mt. Moriah and was stopped by God, and instead Abraham offered a ram, caught by its horns in the thicket, when Adam and Eve attempted to cover their shame with fig leaves and God instead provided for them garments of skin, when Naaman washed seven times in the Jordan river to cleanse himself of leprosy, when the spotless lambs were slaughtered at twilight and their blood was smeared around the Israelite doors to ward off the angel of death – all of that beautiful grace, all of that saving intervention, all of that divine mercy is that child lying in the Bethlehem manger. Christmas gift, Christmas joy, Christmas love, Christmas Child – the Lord has come; let earth receive her King. Jesus is the Ten Commandments. Jesus is the Last Day. Jesus is the new and greater Adam who will father the family of heaven.

The Gospel of John was written with the goal to create faith in you, the goal to create faith in Jesus as the Christ. St. John writes: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). He's the gift. The gift is forgiveness, life, salvation. The gift is heaven. The gift is God's love, God's Spirit, God's life. You've received it, all of it. "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who *did* receive him, who believed on his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:11-13). You've received the gift, today's gift, an eternal gift, a gift like no other. You believe on His name, the name that is above every name.

What kind of God, what kind of King do you believe on? A crucified King. You believe that Jesus, in His truly human flesh, bore all the sins of the world and suffered His Father's wrath on a very particular Friday afternoon. You believe that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin, an ordinary, but devout Jewish young lass named Mary. You believe that the Messianic Savior walked on water, changed water into wine, and raised Lazarus from the dead. You believe that when Jesus died that the sun was darkened, the earth shook, the curtain in the Temple was torn in two and that many tombs were opened and bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. You believe that when Jesus died He crushed Satan's head, that Jesus' death destroyed death, that He was raised again on Easter and by His death and resurrection you are justified before Holy God. You believe all of these things because they are true. You believe all of these things because God has revealed them to you in His inspired and inerrant word.

That is Christ's story. That is the Christmas gift that you have received and are going to go on receiving. You believe that He gives you His true body to eat and His true blood to drink. You do this trusting in His Words, trusting in God's promises, trusting that Christmas is very much alive in this late day. A crucified Savior rules the cosmos. A resurrected Messiah governs

heaven and earth. A triumphant Lord brings His Kingdom into this earthly realm and we are gifted with it.

We are loved. We know the depth, the power, the wonder of Christmas and joy breaks in on the heart. Singing, communing with God and with one another, this is a celebration of God's nativity, a celebration of a new creation, a celebration of life. In Him was life and that life was the light of men (John 1:4). The light of Christ shines in this place. No darkness can overcome it (John 1:5).