

“THE GIFT OF GIFTS.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: John 1:1-18; Galatians 4:4-7

Prayer: Jesus, you are the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. Come now and dwell among us in the preaching of your Word. By your grace give us your truth that we might see the Father and be filled with your Spirit. And do this we ask all for your glory. Amen.

Introduction.

What's the worst gift you ever received, some gift you didn't need or didn't want? An ugly sweater, a music cd you don't like, wrinkle cream. I hear fruitcake is a real crowd pleaser. One of my worst gifts ever was in college when someone gave me a gerbil in a cage for my birthday. I lived in a dorm, it smelled, it had to be fed and the caged cleaned. I had to keep telling myself it's the thought that counts.

My dear wife says she has forgiven me but she has not forgotten the year I gave her hubcaps for her van, or the year I gave her a fire extinguisher for Christmas. She totally misunderstood it as a statement about her cooking.

What makes a gift especially great? It's something you really need or want. The person knows you so well that they just nail it, like how did they know, it's amazing. I am impressed with those people who are paying attention and listening and pick up on something you said six months ago, and they remember and there it is at Christmas. I have received some of those.

The very best gifts come from a giver who really knows us well, who knows our deepest and most heartfelt needs and wants. And when this happens there is a connection between both parties. The giver and the receiver both know the gift is perfect and both are blessed in the exchange. Both receive joy.

God's gift to us was tailor-made, custom fit, it was just right, the absolutely perfect gift, the gift better than any other gift we have ever receive. If we truly knew our deepest needs we would truly rejoice over the gift God has given us.

The Word became flesh.

We have talked for two weeks about the incarnation and we haven't even gotten to the best part yet. The glory of the incarnation is not that Jesus came down to earth. The glory of the incarnation is *why* Jesus came down.

God put a lot of thought into the gift He gave us in Christ. He didn't come up with it nine months before Mary gave birth, or even when He called Abraham to be the beginning of Israel, or even back in the Garden of Eden, or even at the beginning of creation. God has been thinking about this gift from before the foundations of the earth.

God has given us the gift of all gifts. Why? For what reason?

Why?

Three reasons. To show us the Father, to show us ourselves, and to reconcile the two.

The Word became flesh to show us the Father, vs. 18.

For many people if you can't see it, it doesn't exist. Remember the famous statement by the Soviet cosmonaut in 1961 when he became the first man to go out into space. He reported back, "I don't see any God out here." He doesn't exist.

There is no such thing in the Bible as a hidden God, a God who is silent, a God who is absent, a God who doesn't care, a God who is not there. People try to hide from God, people try to ignore God, people say there is no God out there.

But not God. God comes, God shows Himself, God speaks. In the OT He was seen and accessible through mediators, through signs and symbols, through prophets and priests, through the tabernacle and temple, through burning bushes, pillars of cloud and fire.

God revealed Himself in the Law of Moses. The Law was like John the Baptist, it was a witness, pointing to a greater reality. The Law was not the grace and truth, but a witness to the grace and truth. Or should I say the Law was one kind of grace, and Christ is grace upon grace.

God became visible and accessible to us when the Word became flesh, embodied in the person of Jesus. In the OT God was like a stick figure, in the NT He became like a masterpiece portrait.

Hebrews 1:1-3 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, ... 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

Do you see our blessing? We are superior to the patriarchs and prophets, we have it better than Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, than Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. They didn't see what we see. They saw from behind a veil, we have had the veil removed, they had a candle, we have the sun.

We have the Word made flesh, grace and truth, living, breathing, walking among us. Jesus came to make the invisible God visible. The incarnation is like a translation. When God in Christ became man, divinity was translated into humanity.

John 14:6-10 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him. 9 Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. I am in the Father and the Father is in me.

Colossians 1:15, 19 He is the image of the invisible God, ... 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

Hebrews 1:3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

God wants to be seen and known in and through His Son. If you know the Son you know God. Christ reveals to us as much of the Father as our feeble and finite minds can comprehend.

And what does He most want us to see? His glory. And what does that look like? Grace and truth. Not grace or truth. Not grace sometimes and truth other times. Not OT truth, NT grace.

Grace-only people are nice, but often they just care about being liked or loved. Truth-only people have convictions and principles but often they just care about being right. If everyone loves you or if everyone hates you then one of these might be out of balance.

You parents know this very well, how you are constantly making judgment calls and exercising discernment to know which way to go in any given crisis or sin

situation. How many times did we discipline in one case and give grace in another? And sometimes got it backwards.

Many people think Jesus is grace and grace, love and love. Remember the woman caught in adultery. Jesus said let those without sin cast the first stone, then when no one did He said neither do I condemn you. Grace. Then what? Go and sin no more. Truth.

Which do you think we need more of here at First Church? I hope you would answer we need more of both. Depending on the situation or circumstance each of us need more of one in one moment and more of the other in another moment.

God is grace, merciful, redeeming grace. God is unbounded love. He is full of grace and shows us grace in Jesus.

God is true, God is real, God can be known, and Jesus is the way, the truth and the life to see and know that. The Word became flesh in a way that reveals grace and truth. This is the glory of God revealed to sinners.

I wonder if there is someone here who is thinking, this is all well and good, but I haven't seen any glory, I haven't seen any bright shining lights, I haven't seen what the shepherds saw out in the field.

Don't think this "showing us the Father" means some outward glorious display like what Peter, James and John saw on the Mount of Transfiguration. They were the only three men in those days who could boast of that kind of vision, oh, and then later Paul on the road to Damascus.

To everyone else Jesus looked human. Remember what Isaiah prophesied,

Isaiah 53:2 he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.

His glory is His grace and truth, glory that is seen with the eyes of the heart. If you don't see it, ask God to open the eyes of your heart so you can see it.

What has Satan done?

II Corinthians 4:4 The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

You need spiritual eyes to see the glory of Jesus. If you see the glory of Jesus, that is the grace of the God on your life, that is the power of the Holy Spirit. If you don't see the glory of Jesus, ask God to open your eyes. Pray to see Jesus' glory. Jesus prayed that for us, pray that for yourself.

John 17:24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

It was the love of God that sent Jesus to earth. It was out of great grace that Jesus came. Jesus is the love of God with skin on, the grace of God with skin and bones. God's coming to us is a stunning display of love to a people who don't deserve it.

The Word became flesh to show us ourselves and our need for a Savior.

Before Christmas can be good news of great joy, we have to know the bad news about Christmas. The gift of all gifts won't seem like a gift at all until we know how much we need it. There are hints of our need in these first 18 verses.

This is a world with darkness, vs. 5.

This is a world that doesn't know or receive its creator, vs. 10.

This is a world that doesn't believe and is not in God's family, vs. 12.

This is a world that needs to hear a message of grace and truth, vs. 12, 17.

Jesus saw the darkness and became light.

Jesus saw the lies and deceit and became the truth.

Jesus saw the hate and became love.

Jesus saw the strife and became peace.

Jesus saw the hopelessness and became hope.

Jesus saw the despair and became joy.

Jesus saw the lost and came to show the way.

Jesus saw the tears and came to wipe them away.

Jesus saw the death and came to give life.

Jesus saw the sheep without a shepherd and became the great shepherd.

Jesus saw the sickness and became the great physician.

Jesus saw the sinner and became our Savior.

He became poor that we might become rich.

He was born of a virgin that we might be born of God.

He took our flesh so we could receive His Spirit.

He lay in a manger so we could live in paradise.

He came down from heaven, so He could bring us up to heaven.

He became like us so that we could become like Him.

Since we won't and can't draw near to Him, He draws near to us. Emmanuel, God with us.

The Word became flesh to make us children of God, vs. 12.

The gift of all gifts shows us the Father and show us our true selves and reconciles us to the Father.

Galatians 4:4-7 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

John gives two conditions for becoming children of God.

John 1:12 But to all who did *receive* him, who *believed* in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Receive Him as your Savior. Take Him at His Word, receive Him into your heart and life.

Believe in Jesus by faith, trust in the name of the incarnate Son of the living God, Jesus Christ. By faith we are made the adopted children of God, we receive the glory of being esteemed as sons and daughters of God.

I John 3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

What good is the incarnation, what good is Christmas if Christ is not born in our hearts and loved by us?

Sending this gift was an incredible risk, because whenever someone shows us love they become vulnerable, their love can either be received or rejected. He came to His own and His own did not receive Him. This is the dangerous vulnerability of love.

That is the place all of us are in, we either receive God's greatest gift of love to us in Christ or we reject the most costly gift ever given to us. Is it not utter arrogance and folly to reject the greatest gift from the greatest giver who knows our greatest need?

The incarnation humbles us because it tells us we need a Savior, a God-man to be born into the world to save us from the condemnation we have brought on ourselves.

II Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

We are also humbled when we realize we are the recipients of the greatest gift of all gifts which we needed more than anything else, which we don't deserve and can never repay.

We cannot thank God too much, we cannot honor Christ too much, we cannot love Him and worship Him too much.

Christ has revealed our Father in heaven to us and Christ has revealed our hearts to us through the light of His Gospel of grace and truth, and Christ has reconciled us to the Father and made it possible for us to be called the children of God.

There are billions of people on this planet who do not call God Father. Do you find yourself almost speechless at the privilege of knowing the Father and calling Him Father?

And because of Christ, the Father looks at you and calls you His beloved.

As you prepare to give and receive gifts remember you are imitating the giver of the gift of all gifts. When you give a gift it represents you, it reflects you, it reveals you, as God's gift does.

Christmas is about God revealing Himself in the giving of Himself. This grace gives meaning to all of life. This gift is the hinge all human history turns on.

As you read this text each day this week thank God for thinking up the perfect gift, just exactly what we needed and how He continues to bless us with what we need everyday.

Prayer: Holy Father, thank you for the gift of your Son who makes you known. And thank you that we are not strangers to the Gospel. Grant to each one of in the room the gift of new birth that all of us might be called children of the living God and might know the grace and truth and joy of this season. In the name of Jesus Christ and for His glory, Amen.