

First Sunday after Christmas,
December 31, 2017
Colossians 3:12-17
The Gift of the Christ is More than the Gift of a Child
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Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

Christmas surely is the celebration of a child's birth. It was not unusual to see "Birthday Party for Jesus" celebrations over the last weeks. The gift of a child, even an ordinary human child, is reason to rejoice.

There is more to the birth of any little boy or girl than meets the eye. What joys and sorrows will the child bring to us or experience? What paths will they blaze, or what obstacles must they overcome? So much is hidden about what that birth actually brings.

There is no such mystery with the gift of the Christ. We know the joys and sorrows he has brought us and experienced. We know the paths he walked and the obstacles he overcame. We know what his birth brings for us and for the world.

This child is God's undeserved love freely extended to sinners. Jesus is the Christ, God's Anointed One. He is Immanuel, God with us. He is the Righteous One who lived, and died on the cross for the unrighteous. Earlier Paul wrote of Jesus, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." [1:15, 17]

Jesus is so much more than another baby boy. His mother, Mary, pondered this in her heart. Simeon and Anna saw beyond the flesh and blood. We need to look beyond the gift of the child lying in a manger.

The Gift of the Christ is More than the Gift of a Child. He is the gift of Christian graces. He is the gift of binding love.

Paul had heard that false teachers were trying to lure his "holy and faithful brothers at Colosse" away from the gospel. These enemies of Christ were trying to take the Colossians "captives through hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ."

The apostle just had to write words of encouragement to them. He was in prison in Rome. He was struggling for them in spirit and in prayer. Paul knew how firm they were in faith. He also knew how deadly to the spirit false teaching is.

The true and living God has called us to be his own in Christ. So the apostle started there. "Therefore, as God's elect, holy and loved, clothe yourselves." God chose the Colossians and us. We are holy in Christ's righteousness. God has loved us in Christ.

The believer's Christ centered life strives always to glorify that Savior. The Christian life, our practical habits as God's children, never means to glorify ourselves. It is to glorify the One who called us to be his very own. How do we glorify him?

The gift of the Christ is more than the gift of a child. He is the gift of Christian graces. These are the virtues we manifest externally from the new heart the Holy Spirit has created in us. They are the demarcation lines that separate us from the ungodly of the world.

We clothe ourselves in these graces. What are the individual garments we wear to glorify Christ? "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience." To put on these is to put on

Christ. Paul wrote to the Romans in chapter 3, “for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

At the same time, we do not bear grievances against others but forgive them. The airing of grievances, all the things we have got against people, is not what Christians are about. Yes, sometimes such sin comes into our lives. We dare not let the sin take root in our hearts. Instead, “Forgive, just as Christ forgave you.”

What is the thing that binds all Christian graces together? The gift of Christ is also the gift of binding love. This is the binding love “which ties things together in perfect unity” we have for the people to whom we are showing those virtues. Without love it is all for nothing, just an empty sound, as the apostle wrote in the familiar words of 1 Corinthians 13. Our binding love for others is the binding love Christ had for us in his sacrifice as the Lamb of God.

As the apostle continues, much of what Paul writes is application. Pastors always look to put practical applications into sermons. Sometimes we are better than at other times getting them in. Sometimes you are better at seeing them and doing them than at other times. What makes a sermon relevant are not just the applications a preacher puts into it. It includes what applications you, the listener, take out of the sermon and what you do with them.

Here the Spirit gives the applications. “Let the peace of Christ control your hearts, to which you also were called, in one body.” There is no reason to remain “at war” with anyone. There is no reason to be “at war” with my own conscience. There is no reason to be “at war” with God. We are at peace with God because God has in Christ reconciled us to himself, not counting our sins against us. This peace unites us in cooperation as a healthy heart and mind unite the members of the body to work together.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” We do that as we teach and admonish one another with the word. We do it as we sing and do liturgy, in other words, as we carry out public worship, with grateful hearts to encourage one another. The word of Christ is our way of encouragement in all those various forms. The word of Christ is not a peripheral part time tool. The word is to be deeply seated and always at the ready for every purpose.

We speak our words and carry out our deeds “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” This means with faith and love. It means we do all things as his representatives. Our words and actions are about furthering the reputation of that baby in the manger and the God-man on the cross so that no one takes offense at his name or actions because of our words and actions.

The Holy Spirit motivates and guides us for our lives together as Christians in the coming year. This is, of course, is no different than 2017. Often we will fail in these Christian virtues and binding love. Just like in 2017. “Forgive, just as Christ forgave you.” What a blessing to be able to keep going to that well to repent and strive with ever greater purpose to put on those virtues and genuine love.

Christian living is living in the graces and love that are the child in Bethlehem. It is not about obeying human regulations; those hollow and deceptive philosophies Paul warned against. Holiness is not keeping certain days and festivals and the written code of the law. It is showing compassion and humility and patience and love. It is living in peace and love for the word. This is our way of “giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

The gift of the Christ is more than the gift of a child. Jesus is not only the Source of every blessing. Jesus is every blessing. Amen. <SDG>