

Infinite Gifts in Finite Wrappings

St. Mark Lutheran
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Soli Deo Gloria!

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made....And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
John 1: 1-3;14

Do you still hang stockings by the fireplace for Christmas? I ask this, because if you were hoping for a new car for Christmas, you would not expect to find it in a stocking there, would you? I know that whole idea sounds ridiculous, but stick with me here. Do you still wrap gifts in boxes or bags and put them under the tree? If a child was looking for a new bicycle, he could see from the sizes of the boxes and the bags that it was not under the tree, couldn't he? When you pour some milk from your gallon container at breakfast or lunch, you have to be careful, don't you? You need to stop pouring in time because you can't pour an entire gallon of milk into a 10-12 ounce glass.

The point is, a thing can hold only what will fit inside. A "finite" thing is something that has a limit. We call something "infinite" if it has no boundary or limits. It's been said that the finite is not capable of containing something bigger than it is, let alone containing something that is infinite, without any boundaries or limit.

Or so it was thought. God, has chosen to be the exception. He is "big" enough to make himself "small". He is the true "Infinite", one without bounds or limits, who can *be* where it pleases him to be and *do* what it pleases him to do.

Actually, God had done something similar long before Christmas came about. Exodus 40 tells us he put his glory in the tabernacle of old, over the mercy seat, between the cherubim. That is something when you consider that he has told us that his glory fills the heavens and the earth.

But all of this takes on even greater significance at Christmas. The Apostle John tells us about "The Word" in our Gospel reading this Christmas. The Word, John says, was in the beginning with God. The Word, John says, was God, without whom nothing that was made was made, and through whom all things were made. In this Word was life, and the life was the light of men. Then, the first step was made toward providing a Savior for mankind. John tells us in verse fourteen that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son of the Father. With this miraculous event, humanity was taken up into divinity.

In Jesus, God did the unthinkable. He put the "infinite" in the grasp of our "finite" minds. We could better grasp important revelations about God as revealed in words such as glory, grace, and truth. One could say that God's glory, God's grace, and God's truth were all stuffed entirely into Jesus, to be looked at, grasped, and believed.

Now you know what heresy is, don't you? It is a religious teaching contrary to the belief of the church. Christians use the term to describe what they believe is a false teaching. As long as there is an enemy such as Satan around, the Christian church is going to be afflicted with false teachings. It is no mistake that Satan is called the "Father of Lies."

But out of all of these heresies, which do you think is the worst heresy? In my opinion, the worst heresy has to be the false teaching that Jesus is not God incarnate. There are, even in our day, religious groups that want to be called Christian but claim that Jesus is less than God. They try to pacify us by saying Jesus was a great teacher or a prophet, that he was on a special mission, some would even say that he was a son of God, but they all stop short of recognizing that he is God.

But Jesus grew up and started his earthly ministry, and what did Jesus say? He said to the unbelieving Jews, "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am." This statement so angered the Jews they tried to stone him. (John 8:58) He said to his disciple Philip, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9) Jesus added, "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me..." Jesus directly called the Apostle Paul, formerly named Saul, into the ministry. What did Paul say about the One who he had aggressively opposed. After his conversion, Paul wrote about Jesus and said, "In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." (Col. 2:9)

The birth of Jesus Christ was carefully planned, and he came into this world on a mission to save mankind. It can be said without a doubt that the birth of Jesus changed the course of the world. Any skeptics who wish to deny this have no excuse, for God left all sorts of markers throughout the course of history so that there could be no mistaking who he was.

I have in my possession a beautiful publication by Rose Publishing that contains a section titled "100 Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus". What we read in our Epistle Reading from Hebrews this morning is that "God spoke to our fathers by the prophets..." Well, we have the proof to back it up. Rose Publishing has all one hundred prophecies from the Old Testament listed, and along side of them the record of their New Testament fulfillment. Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, his ancestry, his being born of a virgin, his flight as a child to Egypt, his bearing the sin of others, his death on the cross and his rising from the dead, were all predicted hundreds of years ahead of time.

Another treasure I have been blessed with is the book Isaiah 53 Explained by Dr. Mitch Glaser. He is a former orthodox Jew, whose life was changed by one chapter in the Old Testament, Isaiah 53 no less. He wrote this book to his Jewish brothers and sisters, especially those that are not religious, so that they would have a chance to know that the Jews have missed the coming of their Messiah, and that the Messiah is Jesus, or Yeshua, as Dr. Glaser sometimes calls him. There are at least fifteen different prophecies in Isaiah 53 about the Messiah to come, all of which have been fulfilled by Jesus, and they were written about seven hundred years before he was born!

So Jesus grew up, did many miracles and acts of compassion, died on the cross to save us from our sins, and rose again from the dead. Then he surprised the disciples by returning to heaven. But he instructed his followers to go forth and make disciples of all nations.

Here again, the infinite God ignores the understanding of finite men that "the finite cannot contain the infinite." He comes and fills a finite and simple thing, a bit of water and a few words, with his infinite saving power to wash away all sin, to give the Holy Spirit, to even give eternal life.

He calls on us to baptize; he also calls on us to teach. The Word who was made flesh now makes himself words again, to communicate the truth about himself. The Word that has been born a man, by the Spirit, makes us a new creation. So to sum it up: finite water and finite words do contain and deliver forgiveness, an infinite remedy, from an infinite God.

Don't forget the Holy Supper, in which the finite and lowly mere bread and wine, by his creative Word are made to contain the body and blood of the infinite, to bring us forgiveness of sins and eternal life and salvation. Our little minds may stumble at that, but don't forget that our Lord said it, and he called these gifts in the Holy Supper "true food."

So, let us resolve this Christmas, to never forget the small packages or gifts that God has given us, which despite their apparent size, are used by God to convey to us his infinite blessings. Let us never forget that by faith in this Jesus, we are made anew, children of God, born not by the will of men, but born by the Word of God. May our lives echo the words Edward Mote wrote hundreds of years ago that were made into a hymn: "My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus blood and righteousness; no merit of my own I claim, but wholly lean on Jesus name. On Christ, the solid rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand." (LSB 575) Amen.

