

**In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,<sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.<sup>3</sup> The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.** (NIV 84)

Theme: The Gift that Changed Everything.

By now you've opened up most if not all your Christmas gifts—did you get anything that is going to change your life? It may be too early to tell but some gifts may turn into life-changing gifts over time. Maybe it's something like a camera that initiated a life-long passion for photography, or a ball that started your obsession with sports. There are other times when you know a gift changes everything—we just got a dog three months ago, in a way our lives haven't been the same since; or if parents get their child a car for her 16 birth day—it changes everything. There is another type of gift that changes everything in a completely different way:

A cancer patient finally receives a bone marrow transplant or when or when a family living in poverty has their house restored and remodeled. Those gifts change lives—even saves them, as does the ultimate gift, the gift that God gives us: his one and only Son.

Today we have seen the prophecies of God about the coming of Savior. All five of those promises were fulfilled—all five of them came true. Jesus was born of a virgin, in Bethlehem; he came from a long-line of descendants; after he was born his life was threatened and so we born in sorrow and had to flee to Egypt. That is God's gift to us—his own son, born of a virgin in a stable, praised by the angels, and worshiped by the shepherds. It didn't seem as if it was a world-changing event, just a boy being born to a poor family in less than ideal circumstances. But that event, this one gift of God changed everything.

And these were the prophecies that talked about Christ's birth—there are many more that describe who he is, his ministry and his death.

And once again, all of them were fulfilled by Christ. Jesus once said, **You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.** All the Scriptures testify about Jesus. When Jesus said these words there was only the Old Testament; even the Old Testament is about Jesus. It is a story of God's love for his people as he promised to send them a savior by their line. Throughout the Old Testament God gave prophecy after prophecy about the coming Christ. Christ was born and fulfilled each and every one of those prophecies. But now that he has come, God no longer speaks through the prophets; his birth changed everything. Now he speaks through Christ and his Word. We don't need the prophets and we don't expect any other revelation. Everything we need to know about God, we know through Christ and his holy Word. In Christ we see God's grace in saving us, we see his love in sending his son, we see his mercy in not treating us as our sins deserve, we see his power over Satan in Christ's withstand temptation and rising from the dead to crush his head, and we see God's wisdom as we read the teachings of Jesus.

It is also in his Word that we learn just who Christ is and what he has done to save us. This may seem like a strange text for Christmas because it doesn't explicitly talk about Christ's birth. But it is actually the 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson for Christmas in all three years of our lectionary. Why? Because it is a beautiful passage about Christ's dual nature. Luther once said that the two natures are rarely taught with as much clarity and detail as they are in this section of Scripture. This truth gives us so much comfort and joy on Christmas.

Look at verses two and three. First let's examine the one phrase that indicates Christ's human nature. (Christ was) **appointed heir of all things**. As far as his human nature was concerned, all things didn't belong to him; but the Father gave all things to him.

All the other phrases indicate Jesus' divine nature. First it was through Jesus that God made the universe—he was the intermediate agent through whom God created the world. The pre-incarnate, son of God, was present and active at the creation of the world, there was never a time that he did not exist. Secondly: we read that **the Son is the radiance of God's glory**. Jesus possesses the glory of God himself and he shines and radiates that glory—think of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus is the light of the world who shines the gospel's

glory on our hearts. Third: **He is the exact representation of his (God's) being.** Jesus isn't just a reflection of God's being, or an image of God, but he is the absolutely authentic representation of God's being. Fourth: he sustains **all things by his powerful word.** Only God can speak and rule over his entire creation. Lastly, he sat **down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.** From his throne in heaven Christ enjoys the full power over God as he watches over and protects us!

There is one phrase that I skipped—this one phrase tells us that Jesus is both true God and true man. It almost seems hidden, but it is the heart of the Christian message, it is the whole reason for Christmas: **After he had provided purification for sins...** This of course, refers to how Christ purifies us, or makes us righteous—perfect and holy. And we needed to be purified from our sins. For our born with sin-stained hands, stained red with the blood of sin. We were conceived with darkened hearts—hearts that neither knew God nor cared to know, we lived in unbelief and in the darkness of sin. We do say that Jesus purified us and that he made us holy; but only in a way—we are still sinners. He didn't make us sinless—as if we no longer have impure thoughts, that our will is completely in line with God's or that we never do anything wrong. But he does purifies us, he cleanses us from all our sins, he makes us sinless. By his sacrifice on the cross he removed all our sins and paid their eternal condemnation—he makes us pure and holy in the eyes of God, despite our sin, since Christ's perfect life is credited to us. By the shedding of his blood on the cross, we have been purified as John says in his first letter, **the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.**

And in order to do this, in order for him to purify us from all sins Jesus had to be both true man and true God at the same time. That is why he was conceived by the Virgin Mary and Conceived by the Holy Spirit. He wasn't born into sin, like the rest of us, but perfect and holy. As a man he was born under the law and subject to that law, but as God he was able to keep that law perfectly for us. As man he was able to die, but no man can redeem the life of another, but as God he was able to suffer and die in our place. As God he defeated death by his resurrection from the dead and was able to give that victory to us. As God and man he served as our substitute, taking our sins upon himself and suffering through out eternal damnation so that he could

give us victory over death. As both God and man, Jesus purified us from all our sins—not just some of them but all of them. As God and man he is our Savior!

There is no forgiveness without Christmas. There is no purification without the virgin birth. There is no salvation, if he wasn't conceived by the Holy Spirit. But because Christ is true God and true man who came down from heaven to save us, we are purified! We have been made pure by Christ, our sins won't condemn us or haunt us!

That's the gift of Christ. It's a game-changer! And it's not just that now God talks to us in Christ instead of by the prophets. The birth of Christ didn't just divide history, it didn't just change the course of history, he saved the course of all mankind. He came to save the whole world! And that is what he did. And since you are part of the world, he came to purify you, and that is what he did. This gift was given to you over 2000 years ago. Even though you weren't alive it is the best Christmas present that you could ever be given. And it most certainly changed your life—your eternal life!

Just think of all the prophecies that were made about our Savior's birth, plus all the other prophecies. Jesus fulfilled them all. The entire Scriptures testify about him. Promises made and promises kept. Jesus is true God and true man and our purifier from sin. That is the whole purpose of the Son of God becoming man. He became man to set us free, God took on flesh to purify us. Today as we celebrate Jesus' birth, let us not forget the reason he came in the first place—to purify and make us holy so that we may dwell forever with our Savior, the God-man, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now to him, who gave up the glories and riches of heaven to become poor like one of us, so that we, through his poverty might become rich—to him, Jesus Christ, be glory and praise now and forever more. Amen.