

The Festival of Christmas
25 December 2013
Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

“The Gift of Christmas is the Inheritance of Life Eternal through the Gospel.”

[God] hath in these last days spoken unto by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds....¹

Hebrew 1:2.

Introduction

God has appointed Christ an heir of all things because through His death on the Cross Christ regains by inheritance His creation.

Because we are Christ's eternal inheritance, we gain deliverance from sin, death, and the power of the devil, and gain life eternal to abide with Him forever.²

These Blessings come to us through the Gospel, i.e. God's Word and Sacraments, wherein He gives to men the Gifts He won for them on the Cross.³

¹Amplification in brackets added.

²“*What does this mean?* I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness” *The Small Catechism*, p. 10, underscore added.

³“For neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe on Him, and obtain Him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the gospel. The work is done and accomplished; for Christ has acquired and gained the treasure for us by His suffering, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained concealed so that no one knew of it, then it would be in vain and lost. That this treasure, therefore, might not lie buried, but be appropriated and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to go forth and be proclaimed, in which He gives the Holy Ghost to bring this treasure

The Great Gift of Christmas is the inheritance of life eternal through the Gospel.

I. Christ Regains His Creation Lost by Sin through the Inheritance Issuing from His Death on the Cross..

A. The Latter Days are the days lying between Christ's First Advent and Second Advent.

St. Paul writes that God has spoken to us "in these last days" through His Son. We see here again the Last Days is the New Testament era, i.e. the time from the First Advent of Christ until His Second Coming again in glory.⁴

Christ, of course, is always present with His people through His Word and Sacraments. Moses writes:

... in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.⁵

Christ says:

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.⁶

home and appropriate it to us. Therefore sanctifying is nothing else than bringing us to Christ to receive this good, to which we could not attain of ourselves." *The Large Catechism, Part Second, Of The Creed, Article III.38-39, Triglotta*, 689.

⁴“And the decree of the Council of Chaledon [A.D. 451], as cited by Evagrius, lib. 2, cap. 4, reads thus: ‘Following, then, the holy fathers, we confess one and the same Son, our Lord *Jesus Christ*, and we all set forth with one voice that the same is perfect in deity and the same perfect in humanity; that the same is truly God and truly man, consisting of a rational soul and a body; that He is consubstantial with the Father as regards the deity, and that same is consubstantial with us, according to the humanity; that He is in all respects like us, excepting sin; that He was begotten before the world out of the Father according to the deity, but that the same person in the last days born for us and for our salvation of Mary, the virgin and mother of God, according to the humanity’” *Catalog of Testimonies, Concordia Triglotta*, p. 1109, amplification in brackets and underscore added.

⁵**Exodus 20:24.**

⁶**St. Matthew 18:20.** “I think everyone knows that ‘God’s house’ means where He dwells, and that He dwells where His Word is, be it in the field, in church, or on the sea. On the other hand, where His Word is absent, He is absent, nor is His house there; but there the devil dwells, though it be a church of gold blessed by all the bishops. But where God’s house is, there

But here St. Paul speaks of the special Visitation of Christ, namely, His Incarnation and speaking to us in the flesh because He is the Incarnate Lord. The Rev. Dr. Luther Reed sums it up well:

Lossius, the friend of Melancthon and the editor of a famous Reformation cantionale, speaks of a threefold advent – his coming in the flesh, his return to judgment, and his daily coming the ministrations of the Word and the Sacraments.⁷

B. Christ becomes Incarnate to regain His Creation by Inheritance through His Death.

Christ's First Advent is His Incarnation, i.e., His coming in the flesh in order to bring to fulfill the Promise of the deliverance from sin, death, and the power of the devil. The Apostle St. John writes:

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.⁸

is pure blessing, grace, and life, as the psalmist says: 'We bless you from the house of the Lord.' You are blessed, because you are in the Lord's house. God says (Ex. 20:24): 'In every place where I cause My name (that is, My Word) to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you.' In this passage this verse in the psalm had its origin. Wherever God sends out His Word, by which His name and work and not our name and work are praised, there He also comes with pure grace and every blessing, as Moses declares. But wherever the devil sends out his word and it is accepted, he follows with his curse and eternal destruction. The world, however, does not believe this and considers and praises the devil as God, his curse as a blessing, and his lies as truth. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 14, p. 103.

"Thus in the New Testament there are Baptism, the Keys, and the Eucharist. He who makes use of these in faith does not believe in vain and does not stray from God but surely hears and finds God. Therefore these signs must be learned, followed, and held fast with the utmost zeal. 'In every place I cause My name to be remembered I will come to you,' says the Lord (Ex. 20:24). Therefore other places, other forms of worship, new things, and other endeavors are sought in vain. God is not found there; but where He causes His name to be remembered, that is, where the Word of God resounds, there He comes, not with curses but with blessings." Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 3, p. 146.

⁷Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947, Revised Edition, rpr. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985, Concordia Heritage Series, p. 466.

⁸**I John 3:8.**

The works of the devil were to lead man away from God's Word into sin and death. Christ destroyed those works by Himself bearing the burden for our disobedience and returning men to God's Word. Jesus says of the works of the devil:

Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.⁹

In the first place, Christ fulfilled our obligations under the law for us¹⁰, which obligations we failed to complete because of our sin. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.¹¹

In other words, Christ loved God and neighbor perfectly from the moment of conception and throughout His entire life so that we would enjoy a perfectly holy life of the fulfillment of the law of love¹². David writes of Christ fulfilling the law of God for us even from the womb of the Virgin St. Mary:

⁹**St. John 8:44.**

¹⁰This Blessed and Saving Work of Christ is called His *Active Obedience*, wherein He fulfilled the law of God for us, loving God and neighbor perfectly for us. "As my *Priest*, Christ *fulfilled the Law* in my stead perfectly (active obedience), *sacrificed Himself* for me (passive obedience), and still *intercedes* (pleads) for me with His heavenly Father." *The Small Catechism*, question 132 B, p. 108.

"This teaching of Scripture is of great practical importance. In his life of faith the Christian continually resorts to Christ's vicarious fulfillment of the Law. Luther: 'He satisfied the Law; He fulfilled the Law perfectly, for He loved God with all His heart, and with all His soul, and with all His strength, and with all His mind, and He loved His neighbor as Himself. Therefore, when the Law comes and accuses you of not having kept it, bid it go to Christ. Say: There is the Man who has kept it; He fulfilled it for me and gave His fulfillment to me. Thus the Law is silenced.'" The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 375.

¹¹**Galatians 4:4-5.**

¹²"Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love *is* the fulfilling of the law."
Romans 13:10.

I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou *art* my God from my mother's belly.¹³

Because Christ obeyed for us God's law of love from the moment of conception, we enjoy now in Christ a pure, flawless, and holy conception unto life eternal. Luther writes:

Christ is born for you and ... his birth is yours, and come to pass for your benefit. For the Gospel teaches that Christ was born for our sake and that he did everything and suffered all things for our sake Christ has a pure, innocent, holy birth. Man has an impure, sinful, damned birth, as David says in Psalm 51[:5] There is simply no remedy for this except through the pure birth of Christ. Now the birth of Christ cannot be distributed physically, even as that would not be of any help either. For this reason it is distributed spiritually, by means of the word, to everyone, as the angel says, so that all who firmly believe that it is given to them in this manner shall not be harmed by their impure birth; this is the manner and means to become cleansed from the stain of the birth we have from miserable Adam. Christ willed to be born so that we might be born in different manner In this manner Christ takes to himself our birth and absorbs it in his birth; he present us with his birth so that we become pure and new in it, as if it were our own, so that every Christian might rejoice in this birth of Christ and glory in it no less than if he, too, like Christ, had been born bodily of Mary. ... This happens, if you have this faith. By this token you sit assuredly in the Virgin Mary's lap and are her dear child.¹⁴

While bearing these burdens for us, Christ also gave the last full measure of devotion and sacrificed His life for us so that we would not lose our lives. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

[God] hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds¹⁵

Christ's suffering and death is revealed in the word "heir". An heir only receives his inheritance upon the death of the testator. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

For where a testament *is*, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament *is* of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.¹⁶

¹³**Psalm 22:9.**

¹⁴*Luther's Works*, Vol. 52, pp. 14, 15, 16.

¹⁵**Hebrews 1:2.**

¹⁶**Hebrews 9:16-17.**

Luther writes:

You see, therefore, that what we call the mass¹⁷ is a promise of the forgiveness of sins made to us by God, and such a promise as has been confirmed by the death of the Son of God. For the only differences between a promise and a testament is that the testament involves the death of the one who makes it. A testator is a promiser who is about to die, while a promiser (if I may put it thus) is a testator who is not about to die. This testament of Christ is foreshadowed in all the promises of God from the beginning of the world; indeed, whatever value those ancient promises possessed was altogether derived from this new promise that was to come in Christ. Hence the words “compact,” “covenant,” and “testament of the Lord” occur so frequently in the Scriptures. These words signified that God would one day die. “For where there is a testament, the death of the testator must of necessity occur” (Heb. 9[16]). Now God made a testament, therefore, it was necessary that he should die. But God could not die unless he became man. Thus the incarnation and the death of Christ are both comprehended most concisely in this one word, “testament.”¹⁸

Christ, therefore, regained His creation lost by sin through inheriting it by His suffering and death for the sins of all men.

II. Men Gain Life Eternal and All the Riches Therein by Christ’s Sacrifice because they are Christ’s Inheritance.

A. Men gain life eternal because they are Christ’s eternal Inheritance.

And because we are Christ’s Inheritance, then we can expect deliverance from sin, death, the power of the devil, and life everlasting. For this reason, the prophet Isaiah calls Christ our

¹⁷The mass is the Public Ministry of God’s Word and Sacraments: “But let us speak of the word *liturgy*. This word does not properly signify a sacrifice, but rather the public ministry, and agrees aptly with our belief, namely, that one minister who consecrates tenders the body and blood of the Lord to the rest of the people, just as one minister who preaches tenders the Gospel to the people, as Paul says, I Cor. 4, 1: *Let a man so account of us as the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, i.e. of the Gospel and the Sacraments.* And 2 Cor. 5, 20: *We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in God’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.* Thus the term *leitourgia* agrees aptly with the ministry.” *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV. (XII.): Of the Mass, Of the Term Mass.* 80, 81, Triglotta, p. 411.

¹⁸*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 36: 38, underscore added.

“Everlasting Father”, namely, because He fathers us into life eternal. The Rev Dr. John Gerhard writes:

However, since it is by the power of the Son and the Holy Spirit, one then correctly says that through rebirth we are born from Christ and Christ is born in us, just as we are called children born of God on account of His will. So then Christ **born and given to us** is called, among other titles of honor, **eternal Father** (Is. 9:6), namely because of this new spiritual birth by which we from Him and in Him become a new creature, 2 Cor. 5:17: **Therefore, if someone is in Christ, he thus is a new creature, etc.**¹⁹

Because Christ regained His creation through the Inheritance by His death, we gain life eternal. For Christ did not die to regain a creation that perishes again. Christ died to gain an eternal inheritance. Because we are part of His creation regained through His Inheritance, then, we are caught up in His Eternal Inheritance and gain, thereby, deliverance from sin, death, and the power of the devil, and life eternal.

B. Our Salvation is rich because we are a part of Christ’s Eternal Inheritance.

Because we are drawn up in the draft of Christ’s Eternal Inheritance because Christ inherits us, then, we are wealthy beyond imagination. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?²⁰

This all includes everything because Christ our Savior is the Creator of all things. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

[God] hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.²¹

¹⁹*Seven Christmas Sermons*, tr. Elmer M. Hohle, ed. David O. Berger, Decatur: The Johann Gerhard Institute, First Edition, November 1996, p. 90.

“Johann Gerhard (1582-1637) has rightly been classified the ‘third preeminent theologian after Luther and Chemnitz.’ ... However, while Gerhard is best remembered for his great dogmatics, the *Loci Theologici*, Gerhard produced a number of devotional volumes and preach [sic] many sermons to the ‘common man.’ The sermons in this volume were apparently preached when Gerhard was 31 years old and already superintendent at Heldburg and a Doctor of Divinity.” **Foreword** from *Seven Christmas Sermons*.

²⁰**Romans 8:32-33.**

This rich inheritance Christ gives to us through the Gospel, i.e. His Word and Sacraments²². Of the tremendous Blessing and Wealth bestowed in the Holy Communion, the Lutheran Church confesses:

For here He offers to us the entire treasure which He has brought for us from heaven, and to which He invites us also in other places with the greatest kindness, as when He says in St. Matthew 11, 28: *Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*²³

Who can begin to estimate the inestimable treasures that await us because we have been caught up in the inheritance of the Eternal Son of God? No one can. We gain a glimpse because of the Measure of the Gift of God's Son to us; but, knowing it to be only a glimpse, we await the incalculable eternal treasure that awaits us because our Savior, Jesus Christ, is the Creator and Possessor of all things. Luther writes:

Rom. 8:32: "He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, will He not also give us all things with Him?" These words are beyond evaluation and incomprehensible. The Gift that has been given is very great Eternal life is not as great as Christ. From the very magnitude of the Gift I have received I perceive the greatness of the gift which God has yet to give.²⁴

Conclusion

²¹**Hebrews 1:2.**

²²God's Word and Sacraments is the Gospel. "But let us speak of the word *liturgy*. This word does not properly signify a sacrifice, but rather the public ministry, and agrees aptly with our belief, namely, that one minister who consecrates tenders the body and blood of the Lord to the rest of the people, just as one minister who preaches tenders the Gospel to the people, as Paul says, I Cor. 4, 1: *Let a man so account of us as the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, i.e. of the Gospel and the Sacraments.* And 2 Cor. 5, 20: *We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in God's stead, be ye reconciled to God.* Thus the term *leitourgia* agrees aptly with the ministry." *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV. (XII.): Of the Mass, Of the Term Mass.*80, 81, *Triglotta*, p. 411.

²³The Large Catechism, [Part Fifth] Of The Sacrament of the Altar.67-68, *Triglotta*, p. 769.

²⁴*Luther's Works*, Vol. 28, p. 247, underscore added.

Who can begin to estimate the treasures that come with life eternal? No one can. For not only do these treasures span eternity with all its volume, but also plumb the depths and riches of Christ's Kingdom because Christ is God Himself in the flesh.

The value of these treasures are valued by the Price: The Death of the Son of God for our sins to that we might gain this coveted inheritance. A great treasure awaits us we know because of the Great Price paid for it.

The Great Gift of Christmas is life eternal by Christ' Work on the Cross and given to us through His Word and Sacraments. In this way, we gain life uninterrupted and eternal unto life everlasting in glory and the resurrection of the body because we have been drawn up in Christ's Eternal Inheritance.

Amen.