GOD’S GIFT IS TRULY AMAZING!

1. Because he is who you need him to be
2. Because he does what you need him to do

Did you get a truly amazing gift for Christmas this year? It has only been a couple of days since Christmas. Maybe you have not even opened all your gifts yet, or maybe you are still getting to know how they work or what all of them do. Some gifts you know already are more amazing than others. That will always be the case it seems with the gifts we give one another, but there is one gift that will always be truly amazing.

The gift God has given his people at Christmas is truly amazing, and it stays that way even 12 years later. Our Gospel today gives us another example of how amazing he is! Here Jesus is 12 years old, but what happened since the manger? The new family stayed in Bethlehem for a while. During that time, Jesus went to the Temple for circumcision, naming, and presentation. Sometime later, the Magi arrived. Then Herod’s plot to kill this rival king forced them to leave. Joseph received direction from the Lord to take his family to Egypt. Later he received further direction to return after Herod died. Then they settled in Nazareth where Jesus grew to a boy of 12.

The Bible does not give us details of his growing years, but Jesus would have begun his education which would focus on the Scriptures of the Old Testament. We know Joseph resumed his work as a carpenter, and Jesus would have spent time helping his adopted father. Jesus would have grown up as any other child with one exception: he never sinned.

Today, we have the one event between Jesus’ infancy and his ministry the Holy Spirit chose to record for us. As we consider these words, we cannot help but see GOD’S GIFT IS TRULY AMAZING. This amazement stems from two things: He is who you need him to be and he does what you need him to do.

What kind of Savior did we need? Notice I said need not want. How often do you hear after Christmas: Did you get what you needed? No, it’s always: Did you get what you wanted? Most Christmas gifts are about wants: the video games, the new purse, or the next electronic wonder gadget. But wants disappear when we are truly in need. It is hard to eat a video game. You cannot sleep under a purse. It is hard to wear a TV. But because wants are more fun, they are often the focus.

What would you want from God? If you could choose anything, what would it be? World peace, a cure for cancer, something more personal like a little wealth or fame. How about in a Savior? What kind of Savior do you want? Would you want one to show off to your friends or who gives you all your wants or who listens to all your advice on how things should be done? Would you want one who loves you and your friends, but is quick to strike down anyone who hassles you?

Those might be some of the wants, but this is a question of need. What do you need in a Savior? You need one who actually gets the job done. You need one who can and will follow God’s way. You need one who take your place, pay the price demanded, and have it count for everyone. That is what we all need!

Let’s take a closer look at why that is the case. First, we must understand we need to be saved. We inherit sin from our parents. The Bible says: Flesh gives birth to flesh. This sinful nature produces nothing good. The Bible says: I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. Rather it generates all kinds of wickedness. Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. We see these things in our world and in our own lives. We need a Savior because it is impossible for us to save ourselves. Nothing can be clearer!
We need someone who can get this job done. First, we need one who could pay the debt we owe. Man brought sin into the world and we have all added to it. Such a crime against God’s holiness needs to be made right and it is only fitting that a man should do it. Only blood can cover sin. The price of salvation is the giving of a life. If you want to keep yours, then someone else must give up theirs. So this Savior would need to be human and willing to die in to pay for sin.

But we also need a Savior who can do it God’s way and up to God’s standard. God’s standard is perfection. Really the only one who could keep this standard is God himself. The payment must also count for everyone, otherwise we would need billions of Saviors. The one must be able to offer a payment of infinite value. Again only God could offer such a payment. So this Savior must be God. We need a Savior who is both true God and true man.

And isn’t that exactly the Savior we see here? We see clear evidence Jesus is truly a human being. He had a mom and a dad. His mother gave him human flesh and blood. She gave birth to him and placed him in a manger. His earthly, adopted father provided legal status and protection. Jesus lived in their home and was subject to them.

Jesus also lived according to the Law of God. He studied God’s Word. He made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem as commanded. He celebrated the Passover. We are told: Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. He got bigger and stronger. He learned and grew smarter. All the while, he grew in favor with God and men.

Yet he is more than just a gifted child. His divine nature shows through too. Sin does not tarnish his intellect, so everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. His questions amaze them and his answers even more so. Yet he learns from them also with perfect humility and respect. He has an awareness of his greater mission. He says: Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house? He knew greater things were to come, and yet he dutifully obeys his parents even when he must offer a gentle rebuke.

Here in the Temple, we see one who is true God and also true man. Here we see exactly the Savior we needed. God’s gift is truly amazing! Our amazement increases as we also see he does what we need him to do.

What do we see him doing here? In short, we see him doing everything right. He keeps the Passover. He treasures God’s Word. He is the model student, just as he had always been a model child. Why else would Mary and Joseph not worry when they do not immediately find him on their journey home? And things will only get better. He continues to grow in favor with God and men.

Jesus will continue to do everything right. He will always obey every law, and he will do it perfectly. He will seek out his Father’s will as surely as he sought out his Father’s house. He will pursue it even to the cross. There he will complete his mission, as we heard in Hebrews 2: It was fitting that God…should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. It might be even clearer if we translate that verse like this: It was fitting God should bring the one who made a beginning of their salvation to his goal through suffering. That was just what we needed our Savior to do.

We know we have not done what God’s law demands. We have disobeyed our parents. We have disobeyed others in authority. We have not always treasured the teachings of the Word. Children complain about going to church. Adults do not feel the need to pursue spiritual growth. We could point to other examples. Even more, we know our sinful nature will only cause us to add to our debt. It is our sad reality, and it is just the opposite of what we see in our Savior.

What a comfort to know he has done it all in our place! His perfect obedience under the Law was for us. His obedience earned righteousness which he now credits to us. He
gave his life to pay for the debt of sin. His holy, precious blood is of infinite worth. His blood has covered every one of our sins. He gave his life on the cross so you could keep yours for all eternity.

His whole life, from the manger through the Temple to the cross and the empty tomb, he lived for you. From his first infant cries until the blessing he spoke as he ascended into the cloud, Jesus did just what you needed him to do. Jesus was just who you needed him to be. God's gift to you is truly amazing. Amen.

Pastor Keith Bilitz
St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, Alma City
Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church, Smiths Mill