

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
The Festival of the Nativity of the Lord – Christmas Day  
December 25, 2021  
Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl

### ***That's it?***

"What then will we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him?"

—Romans 8:31,32

Don't you just love this time of the year? Everything is so beautiful. The poinsettia plants are so beautiful. We have the church beautifully decorated for the Christmas season. The music is beautiful. So many wonderful and beautiful songs. The choirs have been practicing for months, and their voices blend with such beauty. The children even sang the Hallelujah Chorus, and it was so beautiful.

You give presents to loved ones, and the presents are so beautiful: shiny wrapping paper, colorful bows. You can see the beauty of Christmas in children, too, can't you? The children look with such excitement and joy. They wait, sometimes patiently. And that is beautiful. They have the look of anticipation and eagerness, that I-can't-wait-to-open-my-present look. Little girls wear their cute, velvet dresses, and the boys are decked out in their handsome, little suits.

Friendships can be beautiful at Christmas, too. Even the boss shook your hand at the office party. The phone rang on Christmas Eve and it was your friend and it was so good to talk; and the Christmas cards and letters brought back memories of good old days and good old places and they made you smile just to remember. Yes, Christmas is beautiful.

But what happens when they take the Christmas decorations down? What happens when the wrapping paper is in a recycling bag sitting in the garage? What happens when the cards get put into a box or get thrown away? What happens then? Do you look back at the Christmas season and utter an audible disappointing sigh, "That's it?"

For weeks, the children have been looking at those shiny-wrapped gifts with eyes of excitement. They can't wait to tear into the presents and discover what lay hidden. But the gift on the inside may fail to live up to their expectations. Depending on their age, they may be too ashamed to say it out loud, but internally, they may wonder, "That's it? That's all I'm getting?"

Maybe for some of you, life has become so dull and so mundane, maybe life has even become disagreeable and ugly. Do you find yourself walking through life and murmuring under your voice, "That's it? That's all you have for me, God?"

I would imagine that there may have been some disappointments on that first Christmas, too. There was a lot of hype leading up to it, wasn't there? Prophets had proclaimed who would be born and even where. With thousands of years of prophetic marketing, God's people couldn't wait to open the gift that God had wrapped up for them. They were promised a Head Crusher in Genesis 3. They were promised a Restorer in Isaiah 11. They were promised Ends of the Earth Greatness in Micah 5. Jesus was the most-hyped person in the history of the world.

But had someone peeked into the stable that night and seen a tiny baby with two poor parents, they might very well have thought to themselves, "That's it? That's the Gift?"

Sadly, we may find ourselves disappointed with God's Christmas Gift, too. He doesn't do what we want or give us what we think we deserve. We want to get accepted to that college; we want to get married to that person; we want to get that job. And if our expectations are not met, do we wonder, "That's it? That's what you have for me, God?"

You may look out into the world and wonder why God is putting up with so much evil. Everywhere we look we see hostility and hatred. We see evil running rampant in our nation. There are agendas that are being foisted upon us, and if you speak up and out against them, you are labeled as an intolerant hater. We may look at our country and wonder, "That's it? That's what you are allowing to happen in our nation, God?"

We look around at the suffering of the world this year. The coronavirus pandemic has become the coronavirus endemic. It just won't end. There's an epsilon variant and a delta variant and an omicron variant. The gamma variant and the zeta variant are also present. It doesn't look like it's going to end. And we may wonder, "That's it? God, you can't do anything more about this?"

Why do we become so disappointed? Why is it that life can at times seem so dull and mundane, disagreeable and even ugly? When we look at the way God handles the events of our world and handles the events of our lives, why do we often become so disappointed? Why do we at times cry out, "That's it? That's all you have for us, God?"

My friends, could it be that we don't fully grasp who this Gift of Christmas really is? Could it be that we get so disappointed with things in this world because we have temporarily forgotten what that little baby in Bethlehem came to do?

On this Christmas Day, let's look again at the manger through the lens of Romans 8 and see just who this "it" is when we murmur, "That's it?" The apostle Paul writes some striking words for us today on this Festival of the Nativity of our Lord. **"What then will we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him?"**

When you look at the gifts under your tree, do you simply see the gift or do you see the love behind the gift? Often it's what is behind the gift that makes it a "great gift." Homemade gifts demonstrate love as someone was willing to sacrifice not just money, but also time to show you their love. Or sometimes people spend a lot of money on gifts because when it comes to bringing others joy, they don't count the cost.

My friends, look at what God gave you in the manger. He wasn't just giving you a baby. He was giving you his Son. More than that, he was giving *up* his Son for you. Paul says, **"He did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all."**

That baby in the manger was God's Son from all eternity. Think of all the experiences they shared. They worked side-by-side creating the world. They went through the flood together, saving Noah and his family. They went through the days of Abraham, promising that through his line the Savior would come. They served together as they rescued God's people from slavery in Egypt. Together they received honor and glory from the psalms of David and the worshipers in Solomon's temple. The Father and the Son shared these experiences with such unity and harmony. But it is a mystery beyond all mysteries: the Father was willing to give up his Son for sinners like you and me. Just ponder that truth and treasure it in your heart. What father would possibly be willing to do that?

Approximately three centuries ago, Paul Gerhardt wrote a hymn entitled, *"A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth."* It's hymn 422 in our hymnals. In stanza two he pictures a conversation between the Father and the Son. It goes like this: **"Go forth, my Son," the Father said, "and free my children from their dread of guilt and condemnation. The wrath and stripes are hard to bear, but by your passion they will share the fruit of your salvation." "Yes, Father, yes, most willingly I'll bear what you command me. My will conforms to your decree; I'll do what you have asked me." O wondrous Love, what have you done! The Father offers up his Son, desiring our salvation. O Love, how strong you are to save! You make his bed within the grave who built the earth's foundation.**

Just ponder that truth and treasure it in your heart. As Mary places her newborn child in the manger bed that first Christmas Eve, there is a shadow that hovers over his head. It will lurk there throughout his entire life. It is the shadow of death until finally when he is 33 years old, his head will be placed on the bed of the grave. And behind all of this is the willingness of the Father to make it happen.

Years ago it used to be a Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary tradition that the professors would share their "Most Memorable Christmas" stories with the students. Many of the professors shared ministry stories that surrounded Christmas. Well, Professor Siegbert Becker relayed how his most memorable Christmas was the first Christmas he was going to have with his newborn son. The new parents were so excited to celebrate their baby's first Christmas and with that anticipation he went to the crib on Christmas morning to pick up his son; only to find that his son had died, on Christmas of all days. As Professor Becker shared the story with his students, he then added, "It was then that I knew how much God loved me, that he was *willing* to give up his Son for me."

The Father willingly gave up his Son for you. Just ponder that truth and treasure it in your heart. What was that like for the perfect, all-powerful God to give up his Son for the people of this world? You know how this world is. You know how evil and ugly this world can be. You know the ugliness of sin that lurks within your own heart. What was it like for God to say to his Son, **"Go forth my Son, and free my children from their dread of guilt and condemnation?"**

For thousands of years God watched a world constantly disobey him and turn their backs on him. God could have said, "Forget it. I'm not going to send my Son to them. I love my Son way too much to have him live with them only to be ridiculed, mocked, beaten, and killed." But God didn't say that. No. He kept his promise. 2000 year ago, God kept his promise as he wrapped up his Son and gave him as the greatest gift to the world.

Just ponder that truth and treasure it in your heart, my friends. Because God followed through on *that* promise, doesn't that give you assurance and confidence that God will keep all his other promises as well? **"Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him?"**

Because of Christmas, you can be sure that God will send his angels to guard you; just read Psalm 91. Because of Christmas, you can be sure God will be with you wherever you go; just read Hebrews 13. Because of

Christmas, you can be sure that even though you may not know how things will turn out for you, you know with certainty that God will work out all things for your good and that nothing, nothing can separate you from his love; just read Romans 8. Because of Christmas, you can know without a doubt that when your head is placed in the bed of the grave, you will open your eyes to eternal life with Jesus; just read John 14.

Be assured of these things. Because God gave us the gift of his Son, **“how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him?”** Today we realize that isn't just lip service. God is true to his promises, and the manger proves it.

Look at the manger. Look at God's gift to you. Humanly speaking, the Gift looks small. The Gift looks fragile. The Gift looks dirty and maybe even disappointing. But just ponder and treasure Paul's words in your heart. **“Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him?”** After hearing that, I pray you don't look at that Christmas Gift and say, “That's it?” Rather, look at this Christmas Gift and say, “That's it! That's what I need! That's God showing his love to me! That's God's keeping his promises for me! That's the Greatest Gift! And he is all I need for Christmas.” Amen.