

... to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:19)

During our 150th anniversary, we've paid special attention to our beautiful stained glass windows. The two biggest depict Jesus during his Passion in Gethsemane and the empty tomb after the Resurrection. This shouldn't surprise us, of course, as Jesus' death and resurrection form the central message of our faith. You might be surprised, though, that the Christmas window, depicting the star over Bethlehem, is quite a bit smaller and more subdued. How different this is from our world's grandiose celebration of Christmas with loud lights, tremendous trees, showy songs, and prominent presents!

Yet, it's in this humble window that we see a glimpse of what Christmas really is. It's not important because of the presents, the time off, the manufactured joy of toys or pop songs or cookies or 'Christmas cheer'. It's because we hear again that the Son of God comes to us in great humility. He gives us the true joy that breaks through sadness. He gives us the light that shines in the darkness. He gives us the peace drives away all fear and anxiety. He gives his Son – to us. God hears our cries. When we're sick, when we're afraid, when we're depressed, when we doubt him even a little bit, God hears our cries and remembers his promises to us. He will give us true comfort and true peace. He will forgive our sins and restore us and make us new again.

Christmas is the time that we need to hear that God answers our prayers. And he does so not with the least amount possible. No – God answers with all that he has. *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...for from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace* (John 1:14, 16). God the Father sent his Son into the flesh, and the glory of the Lord appeared – in the lowly manger in Bethlehem, in the muddy waters of the Jordan, on the tree at Golgotha, and shining forth from an empty tomb on Easter morning. Jesus endured all the same pains we have. He underwent the same temptations – all of them – in the wilderness and beyond. He knew the hurt of being ostracized and separated from his family and friends. Most of all, he endured the pain of death, even death on a cross. Jesus knows your pain, and yet he endured all of it for you. God gives his fullness in Jesus for you. In Jesus, we find peace, and we have forgiveness. In Jesus, God makes us whole.

The gifts of God in Christ will never stop. They will continue to come to us. It doesn't matter if it's 1874, 2024, or 2074. It doesn't matter if you are 9 months old, 9 years old, or 90 years old. It doesn't matter what the world says. Even if you are feeling the lowliness of life, know that the fullness of God has come to work salvation for you. In Christ, *we have received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ* (John 1:16-17).

-Pastor Squire

“As with joyful steps they sped, Savior, to Thy lowly bed, there to bend the knee before Thee, whom heav'n and earth adore; so may we with willing feet ever seek Thy mercy seat.”
 (“As with Gladness Men of Old,” *LSB* 397, v. 2)