

“♪ On the 6<sup>th</sup> Day of Christmas . . . ♪”—Colossians 3:12-15

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “♪ On the 6<sup>th</sup> Day of Christmas . . . ♪,” is Colossians 3:12-15 → *Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

♪ On the 6<sup>th</sup> Day of Christmas my true love gave to me . . . six geese a-laying.” ♪ If you were to ask someone if they’ve ever heard of the twelve days of Christmas most people would probably think of the popular song. It is thought that the song developed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century as a memory game where people had to repeat phrases over and over. If they did so correctly, they received a prize. If not, they forfeited something to others (such as candy or maybe even a kiss).

The worship tradition of the Church actually reflects a different meaning for the “twelve days of Christmas.” While the first recorded

celebration of the birth of Christ happened in 336 AD, the two most common dates being used by Christians to celebrate the birth of Jesus by then were December 25<sup>th</sup> and January 6<sup>th</sup>. Even though a few years later the pope declared December 25<sup>th</sup> the official date of the “Christ Mass” (thus the name “Christmas”), many wanted to continue celebrating it on the days to January 6<sup>th</sup>. Thus, the “Christmas season” of our Church Year Calendar lasts twelve days from December 25<sup>th</sup> to January 6<sup>th</sup>. Today is the 6<sup>th</sup> day of the Christmas season in the Church. What it has to do with “six geese a-laying” I have no idea. Probably nothing.

For many the Christmas celebration is no more than a time for the family to get together to share a meal and exchange gifts on one day of the year. They find its meaning “wrapped up” in a tradition celebrating “the spirit of Christmas”—a phrase which I think is supposed to sum up the feelings of joy, good will and a change of heart which the Christmas season is supposed to bring. However, on the day after Christmas these characteristics soon fade from sight. Many can hardly get through one day of celebrating Christmas let alone do it for twelve days!

Now, some will get to it sooner than others—putting away all the Christmas decorations, that is. The efficient will have everything having to do with Christmas back in storage right after New Year’s or maybe the day after Epiphany (i.e. January 6<sup>th</sup>). The procrastinators may be packing

ornaments and hiding Easter eggs at the same time. In either case, sooner or later, the signs of Christmas vanish and are forgotten until next year.

Spiritually the same thing can happen when the message of Christmas disappears. After the holidays our attention shifts from the miracle of the Christ Child born among us to the daily routine of work and responsibilities. Goodwill may morph into negative feelings and strained relationships. Charity to the needy may take second place to generosity to ourselves. We fail to recognize that “the spirit of Christmas” is really about the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, dwelling in our hearts throughout the year and expressing itself in our responsibilities, vocations and relationships. We have just celebrated the birth of our Savior. How does the celebration of this salvation and forgiveness continue? The text before us tells us how.

The incarnation—God taking on human form in the person of Jesus—was an act of His choosing you as the object of His love, forgiveness and grace! On the basis of God’s choosing you in Christ, you are commanded to live your life with Christ-like character. This is how you continue the celebration of Christmas throughout the year. Verses 12-13 of our text tells you, *God’s chosen ones, to put on . . . compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience*. It says you should bear *with one another and, if one has a complaint*

*against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*

Sometimes, amidst the joy and celebration of the birth of the newborn King we can easily forget the **humble** characteristics of our King. While we by faith focus on worshiping and praising Jesus as our Savior and King, His whole earthly life was a life of humiliation, humbling Himself **for us for the forgiveness of our sins!** The circumstances of His birth portray this humble life as we are told that Mary had to wrap Jesus in strips of cloth and lay *Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn* (cf. Luke 2:7). The ultimate display of His humiliation was in the rejection, suffering and death He encountered at the hands of the religious leaders—**all without sinful retaliation on His part!** We are told in our text to *put on* actions which reflect the humility of Jesus.

Displaying these actions of compassion, kindness, meekness, patience and forgiveness in our dealings with others is truly what continuing the celebration of Jesus' birth is all about. However, the only way you can even come close to displaying these actions in your relationships, vocations and conversations is by focusing on God's perfect love for you in Christ. Verse 14 of our text says: *Above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.* It's referring to Christ's perfect love.

It's referring to a love which goes much deeper than simply loving someone who loves you in return. It has to do with loving **the unlovable**—sinners. Every one of you displays those sinful characteristics in your life which make you very unlovable. The love you are to *put on* is the love of God for you **as personified in the Person & Work of Jesus!**

The coming of Jesus to save us sinners is the ultimate display of God's great love for us. Romans 5:8 says: *God shows His love for us in that **while we were still sinners**, Christ died for us.* The real challenge of the Christian faith is to love the unlovable, to forgive even when it's not deserved. As you come to know this special love more and more each day it will cause you to be humble, gentle and forgiving. And when you've failed to do so it will cause you to come in humble repentance seeking anew the forgiveness of Jesus and those against whom you've sinned.

The celebration of Christmas is a celebration of giving in the greatest form of **sacrifice—the unselfish love Jesus has for us sinners and its display toward others in your own life.** 1 John 4:10-11 says: *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

This is why it is so important to *let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts* (verse 15). This is the peace with God that we sinners now have because of Jesus' sacrifice for us. This was the *peace on earth* as expressed by *the heavenly host* at Jesus' birth (cf. Luke 2:13-14). When *the peace of Christ* rules *in your hearts* it will be reflected in your dealings with each other. Christmas is not just a special time to have a party. Rather, **it is a lifestyle** of celebration all through the year. How?

For Christians the celebration of Christmas continues every day of the year as you *let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*. Based upon this Word you desire to teach and admonish *one another in all wisdom* in an effort help each other remain faithful to Jesus. It happens in worship together, *singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God* (cf. Colossians 3:16). It is only as you are into God's Word daily that it can dwell in your heart and mind in such a rich manner that it moves you to celebrate Christmas as more than simply a season of the year with singing, family get-togethers and niceties. Rather, it moves you to celebrate it with Christ-like actions toward others in everything you do. (cf. Colossians 3:17)

Christmas is the celebration of **Christ's** birth. He is Immanuel, God with us, not just during the Christmas season, but always. We celebrate every time we display Christ's love by humility, gentleness, patience, kindness, compassion and so forth **in the name of Jesus** as we interact

everyday with all sinners for whom Christ sacrificed His life. God has blessed us in our celebrations of Christ's birth with family, friends, Christian brothers and sisters, presents, food and so forth. So let's continue the celebration as a celebration which truly reflects Christ's birth.

No matter when the Christmas decorations are put away, the Holy Spirit makes a permanent place in your heart for the true meaning of Christmas. He calls you to believe in the miracle of Jesus' birth, live in the love He gives, and serve with humility and joy. God's love in Jesus is the one thing you want to have with you and display all year long. Amen.

Let's pray together the prayer we sing in

“O Little Town of Bethlehem” →

O holy Child of Bethlehem, Descend to us, we pray;

Cast out our sin, and enter in, Be born in us today.

We hear the Christmas angels The great glad tidings tell;

O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Immanuel!

(LSB 361:4)

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