



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

December 25, 2024

Pastor James Enderle

Christmas Day Festival; The Nativity of Our Lord

First Lesson/ Sermon Text: [Exodus 33:18-23; 34:5-7](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 98a CW

Second Lesson: [Romans 8:31-32](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 1:1-18](#)

### THE GIFT IS GOD God Gives Himself as One of Us GOD GIVES HIMSELF

1. In \_\_\_\_\_ ways.
2. As \_\_\_\_\_ in action.
3. To \_\_\_\_\_ still \_\_\_\_\_.

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

Is it your tradition to open presents on Christmas Eve or on Christmas Day? Have you already had a lot of presents opened or are you waiting to go home and for the kids to go home and tear open those presents? We have all the presents galore these days. Everything is out there. Everyone is waiting to tear in to see what is there. This season is all about gifts, but today we look at the greatest gift, how **God gives Himself**.

The picture I like to think of this is if you have ever seen some of the videos where a father is out in the military and he has been gone for a few years and he comes back a little bit early to surprise family. So kids get home and they think dad is still really far away in the army but there is this big box sitting in the living room. There is this big box and they wonder "What is this?" It's filled with wonder. But what is inside is their dad. Opening up and getting that present is amazing! It's probably the greatest gift that those kids could get, to see their father.

You can think about so many gifts that you could get but to see God, to see and to be in the presence of God, that's a pretty amazing thing. And this is what Moses wanted. This is what Moses was seeking. He had some amazing things. Here he is on Mt. Sinai and he's talking with God, but he kind of wants more. He wants to see God's glory.

Why he is even up there is an important thing to think about. God had already given His Law and He had announced it to His people then it was written on tablets and Moses had carried that down to the people, but when Moses comes down, what does he find? He finds a golden calf! The people had been released from slavery, from hundreds of years of slavery, and now are free and God had done this and God had given them commands to not worship other gods and the first thing that they do is create another god. Imagine that. So Moses goes down and destroys those tablets and he goes back up again and he is going to receive God's Word. But you can maybe imagine how Moses is feeling. He has been leading the people out. He saw these miracles. And now he wants to see God. He wants to see His glory. He says, ***"Now show me your glory."*** But notice what He says. ***"I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."*** He then was going to put him in a cleft and cover him with His hand and he could only see His back because no one can see His face and live.

Can you or I see the glory of God? No. Moses couldn't either, so we see how God reveals Himself *in unlikely ways*. Is this the way that Moses wanted to see God? He wanted to see His glory. "God, show me who you are. Show me that you have power over these people and over me and that you are who you say you are." But God said "No. I'm going to reveal myself in a different way, not in my glory but I'm going to tell you my name and show you my goodness."

Think about how so often we want something grand and amazing. I think about atheists or people that have struggled to believe in God. Maybe someone who has really never been a Christian and they say "If God really wanted us to believe in Him, wouldn't He just show Himself to us?" Wouldn't that be great? "God, just show yourself to us," and then it would all be fine. What is the problem with that? Could we withstand seeing the glory of God in our sin, in the way that we cannot stand in His presence? We don't deserve that and in fact, God says no one can see His face and live. It doesn't work. So instead of seeing God's glory, God shows Himself in unlikely ways and what we might say is unimpressive ways.

If you opened up any gifts this week already, did you open up any gifts, maybe a big gift or a smaller gift, and you're super-excited and then you open it up and you're like "Uh, alright." Maybe it's another pair of socks or underwear. Or it's a little kid who says "That's not what I wanted. That wasn't on my list." Have you ever felt that way? Is that how we feel with the way that God reveals Himself, in these unlikely, unimpressive ways?

It's important to understand that the way He shows Himself and the way He gives Himself are necessary and important to us. It's the same way where sometimes when

you get a gift and you don't know what it is, you don't know what it's used for, you think "That's a piece of junk" until someone explains it to you and shows you what it can be used for. Then you think "Oh, that's pretty cool!" But sometimes we have to see what it's all about. Even though God is not showing Himself in the most amazing way, we see how important it is how He shows Himself. God says that He shows Himself in His name and His goodness. What does that mean?

This next section of Scripture where God explains who He is as He passes in front of Moses proclaiming His name is a section of Scripture that is repeated over and over again in the Old Testament. You'll hear it in sections quoted in the Psalms. This is so much of the heart of who God is and His love for us. Listen to what it says in Verse 6. ***"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."*** Notice the emphasis on who God is: The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God. This is Yahweh, that Covenant God, the God who is Mighty but is relational. To even consider that He is relational in the Old Testament, it was hard to understand that, but here He is talking to Moses and explaining who He is. He is compassionate and gracious; slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. The idea of love and faithfulness in Hebrew is this covenant love, this love that is faithful, as it is translated. Love and faithfulness, or a way you could talk about it is goodness in action. God gives Himself to us *as goodness in action*. This is what He says, that He is coming to us, not in glory, but in goodness and love.

Notice we often talk about sharing Law and Gospel, but notice what He does here. We hear Law, that He is bringing justice and punishment, but notice He first speaks about the Gospel, this goodness in action, the compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. How does God show His goodness in action? How could He both do these things of showing love to generations, to thousands and thousands, but also bring justice and punishment to people? How could that be possible? How does God show His love in action?

We hear that in John. The epistle of John where it says God showed us His love by sending His Son. His goodness in action isn't just an emotion or a feeling you talk about in marriage or a relationship. You might say "I love you" and you have that great feeling, but it's not just a feeling or emotion. The greatest love is shown in actions. And God sent His Son. Notice what we hear in John 1 where God is giving His Law. ***For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*** Notice God gives us His goodness in action by sending His Son. But then Jesus came to act. He came as a baby in the most unlikely, unimpressive way; in a way that many people look and say "In Bethlehem, from Nazareth! What good can come from there?" He was a man that didn't look impressive, but He came to save, with love and compassion.

Then when we look and we see that the guilty wouldn't be left unpunished, how is that possible if He is going to forgive the sins of thousands and thousands of generations? It is by punishing His own Son. God loves you so much that this goodness in action is putting your sins on His own Son. Justice was carried out. The truth is, when we hear what He says to Moses about punishing those guilty, we should fall under that as well.

Should we fall under those who maintain love, the ones that God should show compassion and graciousness to? We know ourselves. We know that we are guilty. We deserve His punishment. But instead we get His love and forgiveness, through Christ; through this unlikely Savior, through the hiddenness of God—that God could save the world through a cross and an empty tomb, all starting in a manger. What beauty we see of God's love in action as God gives Himself for you. But know it's not just done there. God gives Himself *to you still today*.

Think about all the goodness and mercy that is shown to Moses and to the people that Jesus was with, but God continues to do that. How did He come on Christmas? He came in the flesh. The Word became flesh. He took on body and blood. We talk about the incarnation. If you know a little bit of Spanish or Latin, "carne" means "flesh." He took on flesh, body and blood, for you and for me, to redeem us in body and blood.

How does He still come to you today? What do you get to take today? Come and receive His body and blood to receive that forgiveness. Some might say "That's a very unlikely way and an unimpressive way that God comes to us, that eating and drinking," but God works His forgiveness. He gives that goodness that we need over and over again because I have been unfaithful while He has been faithful.

While we open presents, we know we get tired of that toy after a few weeks, maybe a couple of minutes. The way that God comes to us sometimes might feel unimpressive. Today is a beautiful day where we have choir and a smaller choir and band and it's impressive! Church is full. Next week, will it seem a little less impressive? There may not be any special music. There may not be as many people here. But God still comes to you. Christ still comes to you daily, through worship, through those unimpressive moments of reading the Bible, those unimpressive moments of talking with your kids about Jesus, of giving and forgiving, of when they are struggling and saying "Jesus forgives you;" to hear that love of Jesus day in and day out where it doesn't feel that impressive. But God comes to you through His Word, through His Sacrament. Don't see it as unimpressive. Even though it's unlikely, even though we see it all the time, God has become flesh. To think how amazing it is that Moses just wished to see God, he wished to see His glory. And we know that Jesus came in glory but yet muted; muted because He was walking among people. Imagine if He was like He was in the Transfiguration and I think even in the Transfiguration He was muted. But what do we get to look forward to?

We get to look forward to see God in His glory. We can stand in His presence in heaven because of what Christ has done for you and for me; that Christ came in flesh to tear down that barrier, to make you and me holy, forgiven; to give you peace and forgiveness now. You can have it. You know that you're forgiven, even though we know we don't deserve it. And so that you can have peace and forgiveness and hope forever knowing that your Lord has come and given Himself for you. That gift might not look that impressive, but oh man! God giving Himself is the greatest gift we could ever have! Amen.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.