**AMAZING GRACE & AMAZING LOVE**

**IS. 9:2, 6-7 / IS. 11:1-3a, 4a, 6-9 / LK. 1:26-35, 38 / LK. 2:1, 3-7 / LK. 2:8-16 / MT. 2:1-12 / JN. 1:1-14, DEC. 24/21**

Well, it’s pretty remarkable isn’t it, to hear these lessons set out like this, along with the Christmas carols/hymns that help us recount what happened 2000 years ago through Advent & right up to Jesus’ birth that we celebrate tonight. We have all these suppositions about how the Christmas story goes or is supposed to go. There are 3 shepherds & 3 wise men, & so on. The other thing that really stands out is there’s no complete Christmas story when you only read 1 of the Gospels. It takes all 3 of the writers to give us a full understanding of what really happened during that 1st Christmas. Mark, had absolutely nothing to say about the event at all—how’d that happen?

 **So I guess it’s safe to assume** that you’ve pretty much wrapped up the shopping, the covid-limited partying, checking out the light displays where they are spectacular by now. Hopefully the frantic rush is over and the quandary of what to buy for whom is history. But there’s tomorrow’s unwrapping of gifts—of items you really want and some not so much.

 **Christmas time has become a movement of its own**. There’s no end to the mushy senti-mentalism depicted in movies that have gushy love happening everywhere, because it’s Christ-mas or because Santa sets things up. People are into Christmas in a huge way. Even when it’s not politically correct, many people of other faiths get into it with good cheer and gift-giving. The real question is, “**Is that all there is to this holiday or is there more to Christmas?”**

 **Sometimes all the glitz** of Christmas can leave us more than a little empty inside. When

 the food’s been devoured and the gifts have been opened, we might wonder, “Now what?” Is there a better gift? **How good would it be** to receive a gift that would leave you truly satisfied —something that could bring real comfort and happiness, even through the struggles of life!

 **Well, there’s good news. There is such a gift, made just for you and given by someone** who knows exactly what you’re going through. It has your name on it and it’s always been wait-ing to be opened. It’s custom-made, has unlimited potential, promises you freedom and gives you more than anything money can buy. The best part?—it comes from someone really special.

 **It’s a gift like your greatest dream come true, that meets your deepest needs**.

 **It’s a gift of freedom**, something that brings true liberation, maybe from an addiction or fear of disease or worries over a desperate financial situation or the stress of a difficult job. It’s a gift that offers hope that things can change. It’s a gift that assures you that someone is walking side by side with you, giving you support and encouragement for what lies or may lie ahead.

 **It’s a gift that money can’t buy**. You know those priceless ones—the companionship of a friend in times of loneliness or a good relationship with a loved one. This special gift offers a loving relationship that brings great joy and peace and makes life worth living. It’s not available at the store, but brings oh so much more happiness and fulfillment than anything in any store.

 **It’s a gift of forgiveness**. You know the times when you’re overwhelmed by guilt or shame. Maybe you’ve trashed a relationship. You’d like to turn back the clock and do it differently next time. If only someone would tell you, “It’s OK, I forgive you. This gift offers that, so that you can move on with your life, without being burdened.

 **It’s a gift of purpose**. You may enjoy many luxuries in life. By the world’s standard you may be very successful. But you may also be very empty. What’s life really about? Why am I here? Imagine a gift that can handle even those kinds of questions! A gift really worth living for.

 As I mentioned, **it’s a gift from someone special**. Sometimes it doesn’t matter what the gift is but who gave it to you. Think about that special simple drawing from your grandchild that means so much or flowers from a loved one. The giver can make all the difference. This gift is from someone who knows and loves you deeply and only wants the best for you.

 **It’s a gift, amazingly enough, that is absolutely free**!

It certainly sounds **like a great gift! Can it possibly exist?** The great news of Christmas is that **such a gift really exists**. It doesn’t come in a box but in the form of a very special person.

**Our worship hymn tonight** was “What Child is This?” **Two thousand years ago Jesus Christ was born. Because God loves us He sent** His own Son to earth as a baby. **His purpose in living** with us was to die for us and then rise 3 days later. That action has reconciled us to God, made us right with God. The result is that He now invites us to enjoy eternal life, in a never-ending relationship with Him. That’s what child this is; that’s who this child is!

 **But this gift is like an ordinary gift in 1 other important way. The gift has to be receiv-ed and opened**. I could have the best gift in the world, but if I don’t unwrap it and put it in the closet, it’s absolutely useless to me.

 **Jesus is God’s gift to us**. Because He is God’s Son, He can give us so much more even than what I’ve already mentioned. **Because He’s the Son of God**, He has ultimate power over life and death, along with the assurance of God’s unconditional love. **And did I mention hope for the future? No matter what our future holds, our future is safe in God’s hands, because Jesus always walks alongside us**. **And one last thing**. While it may be on your mind about the one who allegedly knows whether we’ve been “naughty or nice”, with Jesus, you don’t need to have been good to re-ceive His Christmas gift. It’s simply there for you to accept. And if you do, when you do, He’s waiting for you with His arms open wide, even though, or maybe especially when, you are empty-handed.

 **Light has come into the world tonight**. Jesus is the light of the world. He is the light of life! Then remarkably, Jesus turns the tables. He says that we are the light of the world. So go this night and be just that. In a world obsessed by darkness and hopelessness, go and let your light shine so that others may not just hear, but see the good news that is Emmanuel, God with us. Light up the world around you because you want to live with Jesus in your heart and you want to be like Him! Merry Christmas beloved!