

Christmas Day 2018
“The greatest Christmas exchange”
gives the right to become children of God” (John 1:12)
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LSB 389

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Amen.

Our text is from John 1:11-12

11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

**12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right (ἐξουσίαν) to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:
(Jn. 1:11-12 NKJ)**

We'll hear that word “right”, exousian, in the Greek, a few times more in this message. Christmas is all about a transfer of rights and powers from Jesus to the sinner.

As you sat around the Christmas tree opening gifts as a child, parent or grandparent, how did you know what gift to open? Well, that's pretty obvious, the one that had your name on it. You didn't dare open up one of your sibling's presents, and if you were like most families, there was an order to follow. First, of course, no present was opened until after church on Christmas day.

Then, mom had to get out her paper and pen to make sure she got every gift noted and who it was from so that the thank you letters could later be sent. Of course, nothing could start until dad sat down with his cup of coffee. Then, everyone could pick one present, set it in front of you, and usually it went from youngest to oldest opening the present one at a time. That way everyone could see and appreciate what everyone else received, right? Of course, the kids had already scoped out ahead of time where their present was located... there was a joy to see your name written on the tag. It was your right and yours alone to open up your present. Does some of that sound familiar or was our family strange?

But, now we let's turn our attention to a far more significant and weightier exchange than the gifts opened around the Christmas tree.

The fourth verse of our sermon hymn that we just sang, “Let All Together Praise our God”, speaks about an exchange.

“He undertakes a great exchange, puts on our human frame, and in return gives us His realm, His glory and His name, His glory and His name.”

What is this exchange describing? Well, it is the greatest of all exchanges that began in Bethlehem with the birth of Jesus Christ. God, the Creator of this universe, became as one of His creatures, taking on our frame, our flesh, and yes sin and shame. Immanuel is His name as we heard last night. God with us.

(Jn. 1:1-3 NKJ) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 He was in the beginning with God.

3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

Colossians 1:16 echos these words. **“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. (ἐξουσία) All things were created through Him and for Him.” (Col. 1:16 NKJ)**

That’s who is in the manger. Truly He is with us, even as a little babe. From conception to death, Jesus experienced everything that we humans experience, but more than that, He experienced the punishment for our sin by experiencing the terrors of hell on the cross.

This is the gift that was wrapped in swaddling clothes for the world - the Savior, Jesus Christ. Unto you is born this day, a Savior who is Christ the Lord. Unto you, means that your name is on this gift, you have a right to open it. And if mom was writing down on her pad a paper what this gift was, it would say, from God to you, your salvation and eternal life. As the hymn says, “His realm, His glory and His name” are what’s in this gift.

So, if this is a gift exchange, what do you and I give Jesus? What does He unwrap? Well, to start with, He unwraps a lump of coal, worse than a lump of coal, a huge lump of our life’s transgressions. That’s what He gets - our record of wrongs, our bad name, our evil intents, our selfishness, greed, hate, our impurity. And He takes it and owns it, doesn’t throw it in the trash, or regift it, but calls it His own.

In our Gospel, sin is simply called darkness. Everything. There’s no naughty or nice, everything is naughty, evil, corrupt.

(Jn. 1:5 NKJ) 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

Again, **Colossians 1:13** speaks of this kingdom, this awful power of darkness that Jesus rescued us from. **“He has delivered us from the power (ἐξουσία) of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,” (Col. 1:13 NKJ)**

This hardly seems like a fair exchange. his light for our darkness. But that is what He did.

Nowadays, our family gift exchange has changed a bit because of distances. It's easier just using an online app called Elfster. Everyone submits a wishlist, a random drawing occurs and voila you are committed to give the person you draw a gift. One more rule, everything on the wishlist has to be \$25 or less. Everything is pretty much equal value. But since you have a wishlist, you are guaranteed to get something you want.

There was no equal value in the great Christmas exchange. We receive everything from Jesus and He receives nothing from us. Worse than nothing, He receives our condemnation for the sins that He did not commit.

**(Rev. 5:9-10 NKJ) 9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."**

Jesus was slain, redeemed us, by His blood, and made us king and priests, to reign on the earth. Sounds like a pretty good exchange. What is the catch? There is none.

Instead, John tells us that we have been given the right to be called children of God. This is our right, our power, our authority, given to us by the One who has the power to give it.

(Jn. 1:12-13 NKJ) 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right (ἐξουσίαν) to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

We couldn't accomplish this. We don't have that right or power by birth, blood or will. Our will is in bondage to sin.

Have you ever heard of a white elephant gift exchange . Parents told me they recently participated in one.

Each participant supplies one wrapped gift, usually of similar value. The gifts are placed in a central location, and participants determine in which order they will take turns selecting them. The first person opens a wrapped gift, and the turn ends.^[3] On subsequent turns, each person has the choice to either unwrap a new present or to "steal" another's. When a person's gift is stolen, that person can either choose another wrapped gift to open or can steal from another player. To avoid never-ending circles, each gift can only be stolen once per turn. The game is over when everyone has a present.

That's a fun game but it doesn't work in spiritual matters. We can't take or steal away Jesus' righteousness from Him, and nobody wants our lump of sin. But Jesus did. He gladly chose our worthless gift and offered His forgiveness to us.

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You,

2 "as You have given Him authority (ἐξουσίαν) over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. (Jn. 17:1-2 NKJ)

The cost - God became flesh, dwelt among us, died among us, rose among us. Ascended among us, and promises to return among us so that He will always dwell among us in heaven. And even He offers His very body and blood among us now that we would receive forgiveness of our sins this Christmas. Take and eat this is My body given for you. Take and drink this is My blood shed for you! This is Jesus' Christmas present to you. This sacramental gift has your name on it!

7 "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again.

18 "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power (Εξουσίαν) to lay it down, and I have power (ἐξουσίαν) to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

(Jn. 10:17-18 NKJ)

10 Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power (ἐξουσίαν) to crucify You, and power to release You?"

11 Jesus answered, "You could have no power (ἐξουσίαν) at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. (Jn. 19:10-11 NKJ)

And this Jesus did for us, giving up His power, in complete humiliation, that we would have the power and right to be called children of God. Now, as His children we continue to enjoy the gift of serving Him, living the dream life, in all that we say and do.

3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness.

4 "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem Will be pleasant to the LORD, As in the days of old, As in former years. (Mal. 3:3-4 NKJ)

What a Christmas exchange it is for you and I, Jesus takes our black lump of sin and gives us His robe of righteousness. He takes our bad reputation, bad name and gives us His name and calls us His children. He gives us His purity so that our lives have meaning, can offer offerings to Him that please Him. He kept all the commandments for us so that by the faith He gives to us, we have kept them too! That gives us great hope when we read Revelation 22:14.

14 Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right (ἐξουσία) to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city (Rev. 22:14 NKJ)

Jesus came that we may have the right, the power, to the tree of life by His gracious giving and enter through the gates into the eternal city of heaven. Our Christmas trees point to heaven, our homeland, thanks to Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem. Jesus came and accomplished the great exchange on a tree, where Adam and Eve had been deceived by the serpent, so that all sinful men and women could have the right (ἐξουσίαν) to the tree of life. It's your present! It has your name on it! Merry Christmas! Amen!

