Colossians 3:12-17 selected: Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves…bear with each other...forgive as the Lord forgave you…put on love…let the peace of Christ rule…be thankful…Let the word of Christ dwell in you…whatever you do…do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Did you catch it? Catch the wonder and marvel of the birth of the Savior Jesus? That’s what the Christmas season is all about. About God sending his Son Jesus into this world to begin his ministry that will result in the eternal life and salvation of those who believe. All of this is accomplished as Jesus shows himself in the subsequent 30 plus years to be the Son of God and the promised Messiah!

But maybe you missed all of that? Maybe you missed just what it was that has happened, you know, that the angels have told you about. How on Christmas Day we celebrate the birth of him who is called: Christ the Lord! Or maybe we just didn’t grasp that this Jesus who is born is the very one who will be our Savior from sin and the one to grant us eternal life and salvation by grace through faith? Did you fail to put together the fact that it is this Jesus who will grow up and then begin a ministry that will prove and show that He is God! Even if you just stopped with the contemplation of the early ministry of Jesus, with those awesome miracles and the things he taught, it would be clear that Jesus is God! Either that or Jesus is absolutely crazy and then I don’t blame you for not really being all that enthusiastic about him.

And if you really want to see the impact of this child who has been born, then look ahead to the events of the Passion and the most important day that follows that. You know, how Jesus suffered and died on the cross for our sins. How he endured the eternal damnation of hell for the souls of the world just because of his love for us. And then, how after three days in the grave, he rose from the dead and with that resurrection proved everything that God’s Word has ever declared of Him. He is God’s Son. He is our Redeemer. Because He lives we too will live in the eternity that God has prepared for us.

No really, did you catch that that’s what this whole past Sunday and Monday were about! I figured maybe you missed it because instead of a church filled and crowded, we had room to spare. Instead of the vast majority of believers of this congregation gathered to give thanks and praise and glory and honor to the one they call God and Lord, that vast majority preferred to skip church. On Christmas Eve night we had less than 100 people here! On Christmas Day we had 29! Seriously, if the Lord were to ask you why you despised him for those services…what would you say? Oh, there was some snow out there! Well, I wanted to give room for others…who incidentally didn’t come to make sure you had room!

That’s why I asked the simple question we started with. Did you catch it? Catch the wonder and marvel of the birth of the Savior Jesus?

Well, here we are gathered for the 1st Sunday of Christmas. Did you notice the bent of the readings that we have before us? It is as if those who put these readings together would grasp and understand what the world would eventually do with Jesus. That Old Testament reading started: **“Gather together and come,”** and then went on to speak of the wonder and marvel of that day when the Lord would begin to fulfill his promises of his salvation. Go on, look back and see that line that says, **“Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth.”** And did you note how the Gospel reading emphasized the wonder and joy that Simeon and Anna had at seeing the baby Jesus brought to the Temple of God! Yep, people excited by and deeply moved by the Savior who is Christ the Lord.

And there is our Epistle reading for today. It will serve as the basis for what we wish to contemplate today. Our theme will be: **BE THANKFUL!**

You do realize that today’s reading is really a stewardship text, isn’t it? Have you forgotten what stewardship is all about? The best definition that I have ever heard is: What a person does after they say, “I believe!” You see, you don’t say, “I believe” and then ignore the Lord. You don’t say, “Jesus is my God” and then act like his word or His call of faith has no impact on your life. It is clear by these words that once we grasp the wonder and marvel of what Jesus is, what He has done for us, the great and awesome gift He is to us, then we are different! We are people driven and motivated by the Lord and his awesome and great love for us! That’s why this text starts out the way it does. **“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved.”** Here is why we as God’s children do everything this text calls for us to do. It is because we have been chosen in Christ. Because we understand God’s love poured upon us, better yet, we understand God’s righteousness that covers us and before the Lord makes us holy and pure! Everything spoken of in this text flows from this awesome gift of Jesus, because it is in Jesus that all of these things are!

And what is it that we are urged to do? Let’s look at each section and see what we are called upon to be and do in the name of and with the gratitude of Christ in our hearts. We start with **“clothe yourselves.”** This is an imperative, a word of command or total encouragement. And look at what we are to clothe ourselves with: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. I am sure we grasp what those are about. Is that what you practice in your life with those who are around you? Shall we ask them? And please note that the encouragement goes on as it says: **“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgive you.”**

Do you get the feeling that everything, everything of our lives is to be motivated by our Lord and Savior Jesus? We clothe ourselves with what He has given us. We help each other which is the point of the word “bear the other’s burden. And we forgive each other! And please note verse 14! **“And over all these virtues put on love, with binds them all together in perfect unity.”** In other words, the ultimate bond of all of these things is love…the love God has given in Jesus. The Love that caused Jesus to die for you, to forgive each and every rotten thing of yours in word, action, and thought. God’s love, there is our heart and core!

Our text goes on. **Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.** Right there again, is the point and reason for what we do and are. The imperative word here is “rule”. It means that Jesus is behind, in you, guiding you, directing you and He is being your King! The modifying words are so telling. What is to rule in you? **The peace of Christ.** That peace is to be in your hearts. Be in your hearts for everyone because we are a body, we are members of one body, namely Christ and the temple He has created us to be! Now did you catch that the end result of this peace of Christ is that it fills your heart in peace toward one another and leads to **Be thankful!**

Now here is where I must chuckle and scoff at the world. How can we have the peace of Christ if we don’t grasp the forgiveness of Christ in our lives? How can we be at peace with God if we ignore, despise, cast aside or trash the very Word and commands of God? How can we claim Christ if we live like the world? How can we be peaceful if we disobey, if we fail to let the peace of Christ rule in our lives and action? Do you really think that your message of Christ is conveyed to those around you as you say, “I love you!” but as you proceed to punch and kick them until they are bloody? Again, stop being like the world. Think and be motivated by Christ and his peace ruling in you. It is the life of thanks we are to have.

We go on. **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.** In many ways the point of this encouragement is identical to the last one, but helpful because it emphasizes other things for us in Christ. In this case the imperative, the command word is “dwell.” Something is to live in you, be a part of you, be at the heart and core of all that you are. That something that is to dwell in you is **the Word of Christ!**

Here is where this section is so interesting and arresting. The Word of Christ is to live in us, and it is to live in us “richly!” Is attending church every other quarter, month or week a fulfillment of those words? So much is this Word of Christ to be in your life that you use it to teach and admonish in the wisdom of God. That is a part of what we are doing here this morning. Teaching you. Admonishing you, that is, correcting what is false and contrary to God’s Word. This is to be done with wisdom. And I never consider wisdom anything other than what God’s Word declares: **The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom!** Do you really have a fear of God? As you skip church, fail to practice thanksgiving, fail to clothe yourself as Christ would have you, where is the fear? Anytime you determine that you can act contrary to what God says and that God will just have to take it is not an act of wisdom!

And I hope you, every one of you, noticed the phrase: **as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”** This is church! Where else do you do those things? Maybe some of you do it at home. But we find the body of Christ, the temple in this context. We find the Word of God for that body in the context. There is no doubt that here is God telling us that church is important! And stop, stop using the excuse, “But I listen to or read your sermons online! That is not meeting this encouragement of God! You are not joining with your fellow believers in thanks and praise online. You are not supporting your church. You are not following what these words tell us is to be! Those things are posted for when you absolutely cannot make church or to review what you heard or in order for you to share with those who do not have the grace and truth of God in their lives. Stop using a tool to help us in our faith as the reason you are despising your faith! And by the way, maybe you really aren’t reading and listening as you say you are because on a regular basis I emphasize being in church and you apparently are not hearing that! God says church is important!

And finally that last encouragement. **And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.** Now, the word “whatever” does not mean you get to do what you want as long as you think it in Jesus’ name. Did Jesus condone adultery, theft, lies, stealing, immorality, cursing, skipping church, idolatry…did Jesus fail to uphold any point of God’s Law? So clearly “whatever” does not include what is godless, so stop fooling yourselves. Work at following Jesus. Work at acting like he is your God, your Lord, the whole point of your life! Then you can say that you caught the excitement and wonder of Christmas. Then you can truly have the peace of Christ and the word of Christ and the clothing of Christ in your life. Then your life will be the epitome of these words, a life of **Be Thankful!** Amen!