

Thanks Be To God.

Text: James 1:16-17

Suggested Hymns:

563, 568, 567, 560, 565

- 1) The Father of Lights
- 2) There Is No Variation Or Shadow Of Turning
- 3) Every Good And Perfect Gift
- 4) Thanks be to God

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is James 1:16–17, ¹⁶ *Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.* ¹⁷ *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

“All good things come from God, and from God come only good things.” This is the truth we are asked to hold before our minds and to cherish in our hearts on this harvest Thanksgiving Day.

It is not at all easy to hold to that truth, to cling to it with all our might, to believe in it steadfastly. It was not easy for the people in the days of St. James to believe that *“all good things come from God, and from God come only good things.”*

They may have they argued, just as we are accustomed to argue: *“How do you account for the presence of evil in this world? Is God the originator of evil? If so, then He is not kind. If God is not the originator of evil, well, from where does evil come from? Is there any creature capable of producing what God Himself does not will? If so, then God is not almighty.”* In that way the argument ran then. And in that way it runs now.

¹⁶ *Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren* wrote St. James. Do not be deceived. Do not drift into dangerous confusion. We read in James 1:13–14, ¹³ *Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.* ¹⁴ *But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.*

The Apostle makes it plain that temptation to evil does not come from God. Evil events may indeed be permitted by God, to prove and improve man, but the inclination to evil comes from within man himself and from the devil.

St. James' insistence is this: ¹⁷ *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.* The truth we are to hold before our minds and cherish in our hearts is that *"All good things come from God, and from God come only good things."* Thanks Be to God. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Father of Lights

We have in this Harvest Thanksgiving text a beautiful designation of God. He is *"The Father of Lights."* By *"Father"* is meant Source, Originator, and Creator. Light is the emblem of goodness. God is the Father of all that is good.

God is the Father of Sunlight. God made that mighty mass of fiery gas which, sending but a fraction of its light to our planet, sustains all earth life. For one unit of light mass sent to our earth, astronomers tell us, 50,000 times that amount is sent elsewhere.

Starlight, too, is sunlight. Every star is a sun. At least 100,000 stars, or suns (visible through a one-inch telescope), are brighter and larger than our sun, or star. About 140,000 stars, or suns, match our sun in size. Over a million are less bright than our sun; a half million much less bright.

God made all of these, as we read in Genesis 1:16, ¹⁶ *Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also.* God made the solar system, with its nine planets, moons, asteroids, and comets, revolving around our sun. He made the stellar system. He made the nebulae. God set them all *"in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so.¹*

God is the Father of the Light of Life. The light of life is a higher kind of light than sunlight, and this also comes from God.

We see it in animals. Life light makes the birds sing, the lambs frolic, and fills the air with the buzz of insect gladness.

We see it in man. In him this light is of a more precious kind, which shall burn on forever. It shall never set. It shall blaze on after the great lights of

heaven shall have been put out. God has created us with an immortal soul. He has breathed into us the breath of life which lasts forever.

We see it in the angels. Every angel is “a flame of fire.”² Those who stand before God’s throne are the brightest; they are the seraphim, the shining ones.

God is the Father of the Light of Truth. On the first day of creation week God made the light of sense; on the last day of creation week He made the light of reason.

Reason gives us the light of knowledge. Every useful book which tells us truths about nature, or our own bodies and minds, our personalities, is a light from God.

But the highest and best kind of truth is about God Himself and about the Way to Him. We have this light in the Bible; and so the Bible is called a “*a light that shines in a dark place,*”³ for it tells of Jesus, the Saviour, who lived and died and lives again.

Jesus is the Light of the World, the dear Son of “*the Father of lights,*” in the Nicene Creed termed “Light of Light.”

God Is The Father Of Holiness Light. This light comes from God the Holy Spirit, who, having called us by the Gospel, enlightens us with His gifts, sanctifies us. No sooner does He touch our sin-blinded minds and our sin-darkened hearts than these begin to shine with the light of holiness. This new soul light will “*shine ever brighter unto the perfect day.*”⁴ All the lamps of grace are fed, as well as kindled, by the “Father of lights.”

God Is The Father Of Heaven Light. The home of God is full of light. In hell is all darkness; on earth there is mingled light and darkness; but in heaven there is only light. “*There shall be no night there.*”⁵

God and the Lamb are the Light of the city foursquare. And everything in heaven reflects this light — the jasper walls, the pearly gates, the golden streets, the crystal river, the white robes.

Grace light burns on earth in the children of light, but this blazes into glory light beyond the bounds of time and place. And all the holy light of heaven streams from Him who is the “*Father of lights.*”

In summary, in God is no darkness at all. Sin is darkness; hence it cannot proceed from Him. God is the Father of light only.

2. With Whom There Is No Variation Or Shadow Of Turning

God is not subject, as are the stars, to revolutions and changes. The so-called fixed stars are not fixed at all. Nothing in nature is stable. Every orb is on the wing. Some stars are so far away that they do not appear to move.

For instance, two stars in the Great Dipper, one at either end, are flying in an opposite direction to that of the other five stars; but not before many years have passed will anyone be able to note much difference in their relative positions. In the case of the stars there is variation.

With God there can be no variation, literally, no parallax. Parallax, in astronomy, denotes the apparent displacement of a star from its true position; but with the "*Father of lights*" there can be no parallax, no real change of place or purpose. God is always in the meridian.

With the Almighty there is no "*shadow of turning*." The Arabs had a bad name for one of the stars. They called it the devil's star or the devil's eye. It has a mischievous way of blinking. Over a three-night period it changes from bright to semi-bright, to almost dark, and then back again to bright.

Astronomers today know what causes the binary star Algol, the old devil star, to blink. It is actually an eclipsing binary star. The two stars revolve around each other. As one flies around it and eventually in front of it, it causes a partial eclipse. A shadow is cast upon one by the other.

But with God there is no *shadow of turning*. He is the same yesterday and today and forever. His perfections and attributes are unchangeable.

For instance, love was in His divine heart before there were creatures upon whom it might rest. Love is in that heart still, in the same measure. No changing from light to darkness and back again. No change from love to indifference, to hate.

His glory is the same. This is why we sing each Sunday in the Gloria Patri, "*Glory to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forevermore.*"

His purposes are the same. God *“desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*⁶

It is His prerogative to say: *“I, am the LORD, And besides Me there is no savior.”*⁷ There is none like Him.

What a joyful source of thanksgiving for us to know God, who is the Father of lights, *with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning!*

3. From Whom Comes Down Every Good And Perfect Gift

Our text says, *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights.”*

By “good gifts” we understand all temporal blessings and providential mercies. By “perfect gifts” we understand all spiritual gifts, gifts that prepare us for eternity.

Today we are especially thanking God for good gifts, the harvest of the land. The word “harvest” occurs over 70 times in the Bible. The very first is that God has promised us in Genesis 8:22 that ²² *“While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Winter and summer, And day and night Shall not cease.”*

The next major recording of “harvest” was when Joseph explained Pharaoh’s dream telling him that there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine.⁸ In preparing for the years of famine *Joseph said to the people, “Indeed I have bought you and your land this day for Pharaoh. Look, here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land.*

²⁴ *And it shall come to pass in the harvest that you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh. Four-fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and for your food, for those of your households and as food for your little ones.”*⁹ 20% of the harvest went to Pharaoh for storage for the years of famine.

In Exodus we learn of three Annual feasts observed by the children of Israel. One was *the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field.*¹⁰ These are part of the ceremonial laws.

We read in Exodus 34:21-23, ²¹ *“Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest. ²² “And you shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest,*

and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end. ²³ *“Three times in the year all your men shall appear before the Lord, the LORD God of Israel.*

Like in the Old Testament lesson for today we read in Leviticus 23:10, ¹⁰ *“Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.*

The purpose of people bringing their best to God was to remind them that God was the Giver and the Source of all their blessings. They were thank offerings. They were showing gratitude to God.

We read in Psalm 107:37, ³⁷ *And sow fields and plant vineyards, That they may yield a fruitful harvest.* This reminds us of the Epistle Lesson for today, ¹¹ *He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.*

⁷ *So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.* ⁸ *And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.*

The word “harvest” is also used to refer to spiritual matters and gifts. We read in Matthew 9:37–38, ³⁷ *Then [Jesus] said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.* ³⁸ *Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”*

This is a missionary text. The harvest refers to all the people in the world. They all need to hear the Good News that Jesus Christ is their Saviour. The labourers are all those teaching and preaching God’s Word.

“Harvest” is also used referring to the great harvest at the end of the world when Christ returns. ¹²

The *perfect gifts* include all that Jesus Christ has done to give us the free gift of eternal life. They include the Word and the Sacraments. They include our Lutheran Heritage based on Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, and Faith Alone. They include our Christian parents who first taught us about Jesus.

What is our response? The best answer is given in the meaning of the first article of the Apostles' Creed, *Therefore I surely ought to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.*

4. Thanks Be To God

Let us recap our thanksgiving to God.

Firstly, from God come only good things:

The gift of His only-begotten Son, the perfect Saviour;

The means of grace, the visible and audible Word; the Sacraments

Peace by pardon, reconciliation through the blood of the Lamb;

Eternity in the heart. John 17:3, ³ *And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*

The assurance of heaven;

Chastenings that serve to make us more "chaste," refinement in the furnace of affliction to find the Son of God there;

The gift of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, who keeps us in the true faith;

The privilege, as stewards of God, to serve Him.

Secondly, all good things come from God.

Do not attribute any good to any other being except the Triune God.

Whatever blessings you have received or shall receive come from God. They include food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day.

Do not say *'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.'* But rather *you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.*¹³

Thirdly, our response is to live sanctified lives as we strive to follow God's Word at all times

Be regular in church attendance. Luke 11:28, *Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!*"

Receive the Sacrament of the Altar often. *“Take, eat ... drink ... Given and shed for you for the remission of sins.”*¹⁴

Cultivation of prayer life, and family devotions. Matthew 7:7,⁷ *“Ask, and it will be given to you.”*

Sharing. Luke 6:38,³⁸ *Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”*

Proportionate giving. We give as we have been blessed. Malachi 3:10,¹⁰ *Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this,” Says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it.*

Witnessing for Christ; personal evangelism. We read in Daniel 12:3 that³ *Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever.*

Our Thanks-Giving to God is to become Thanks- Living. We are saved from sin to service. Faith works through love.¹⁵

We read in the explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed in *Luther’s Small Catechism*.

At great cost Jesus has saved and redeemed me ... freed me from sin, death, and the power of the devil. All this He has done that I may be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him

Let us thank God for the harvest, for both material and spiritual blessings. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Genesis 1:15

² Psalm 104:4

³ 2 Peter 1:19

⁴ Proverbs 4:18

⁵ Revelation 22:5

⁶ 1 Timothy 2:4

⁷ Isaiah 43:11

⁸ Gen 41:25

⁹ Genesis 47:23-24

¹⁰ Exodus 23:16

¹¹ 2 Cor 9:6-11

¹² Matthew 13:43-43

¹³ Deuteronomy 8:17-18

¹⁴ Matthew 26:26-28

¹⁵ Galatians 5:6