**Introduction**

Back in March the mega-millions was up to $1.2 Billion and one person won it. That was back in the news because nobody had claimed it as of two days ago. They came forward yesterday and claimed it. The current jackpot drawn later tonight is at $970M. That would be a really nice Christmas present.

I think 2024 might go down in my head as the year the gambling took over everything. From those massive lottery jackpots to ESPN having their own sportsbook to every report about a game leading with did they cover or not. Gambling became absolutely pervasive. And everything seemed to be reduced to the odds. From daily updates who had the best odds to win the White House, to my insurance company after my accident deciding I was no longer a good bet, to bitcoin being the game – sorry, investment – of choice.

**Trouble in the World**

There are lots of things the world is always looking for. Some you might call gambles. Some you might call investments. And we do it in ways large and small. A trillion dollars is being bet or invested on creating Artificial Intelligence. Whether it ever is actually intelligent, or becomes cheaper in electricity and compute power than you and me, is the bet. Most of our homes have ceased being the places we live and raise families – the homestead – and have become our primary investments. And the vagaries of real estate can make us do things that we would otherwise not do. We don’t want to the lamb dwelling with the wolf.

It is the uncertainty. It’s the curse in the garden – the earth will bring forth thorns – and the work will be separating our food from the thistle. It’s the fear of not being on the top of the food chain. Whether that is Herod hearing about a newborn King of the Jews, or an office worker casting a side eye at AI. It’s the fear of having no room in the inn.

It’s also the flip side of that uncertainty - the envy, greed, lust and impatience. Chaos and change are ladders. There is a tide in the affairs of men. Which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; Omitted, all the voyage of their life Is bound in shallows and in miseries. Of course that quote is said by Brutus, who thought he was surfing the tide stabbing Caesar. Only to have Dante put him along with Judas in Satan mouth in the inferno as the greatest traitor. The world’s worst bet ever.

You place your bets, and you take your lumps or winnings.

**Gospel**

Pascal and his famous wager might be placed on the baby in the manger. And sometimes faith might feel like just another bet. Or maybe a hedge against other bets. If we never get rich here, maybe we can have treasure in heaven. But that is the type of thinking that Freud made fun of the faith over. And our faith really isn’t our bet. As Luther would say about the work of the Holy Spirit. I believe that I cannot by my own reason of strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to him. Or place our own bet on him. We don’t have anything to bet with that is ours.

You might think that the one who has placed a bet in God Almighty. He made all of this. Did he need to do this? Was he not complete in himself? He placed a bet that all creation would glorify him.

Which might have looked like a losing bet. After the garden. Through the long years of Patriarchs and Prophets. None of which seem to have swayed many.

And maybe God is a degenerate gambler. A responsible bettor might have just wrapped it all up. But God doubles down. He enters his own creation.

Which again on a Friday afternoon ourside Jerusalem might not look like a winning bet. The cross looked like losing it all. He came to his own and his own did not receive him.

But it wasn’t a bet. In the beginning was the Word. The Word is one of those words that means a bunch more. This is the plan, the way things were made. It was there from the beginning.

God came to us. He offered himself to us as a pure gift. For unto you this day is born a Savior.

It isn’t a bet. It’s a promise. All who receive him, who believe in him name, become children of God.

And God doesn’t to this by chance or fate or luck. All the things a bet depends upon. He does this by his will. God desired to give you this gift of Jesus. He desires you to be his child. Not children of blood or flesh, but of his will. Of the Holy Spirit through his gift of Jesus.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory…full of grace and truth. He did this that we might see and believe and live.

**Conclusion**

God didn’t roll the dice over your eternal soul.

God didn’t lose you to sin, death and the devil and then try and win you back.

You have always been his and nobody can snatch you away from him. As far away from uncertainty or chaos or betting as possible. He is The King of Peace. Peace that passes understanding.

He came as a gift. He came as the light shining in the darkness. The token of the Father’s love for you. The love of God ere the worlds began to be.

The love of God for you…seen in his sacred face…evermore and evermore. Amen.