

Christmas Day - 2009

Sermon Text: Titus 3:4-7

Theme: “*Saved by God’s love*”

Grace, peace and mercy to you from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Imagine a scene where there is brightly coloured paper strewn around the room, a tree sags in the corner and people are searching for batteries whilst others are heading off to prepare the Christmas lunch. At most times of the year we would think this is some form of chaos but at this time of the year we celebrate Christmas with our family and friends.

It won’t be long and Christmas 2009 will be over and sooner or later we will need to pick up the problems and challenges we have put to one side. They will be ready to resume their place as the centre of our attention. Bills will need to be paid, work will need to be done, school work will begin once again – until we prepare to do Christmas all again next year.

It may be just me, but I suspect many people are dismayed at how what we often call the festive season has become ever more secular. Even watching some of the Christmas music shows on television, I’m surprised at just how few have any focus on Christ as being *any*, let alone the main reason for the holidays. Many of the songs that are now sung have cute references to nice things and happy family times. We have funny lyrics that remind us of spending Christmas in the hot Australian sun, rather than the chill of a northern winter. But we struggle to fit Christ into our culture’s idea of what Christmas is really about. Many people would have you believe Christmas is really about families, presents, a big lunch and maybe bringing a little peace into the world.

It seems we really have two celebrations going on here. One a secular excuse for a good time and the other a celebration of God breaking into this world in order that he can bring us everlasting peace by binding us back to himself through Jesus Christ.

This is the sort of Christmas Paul is writing to Titus about in our second reading for today. This is the Christmas of the Scriptures, the one that is all about the Word that was in the beginning but when the right time had come, took on human flesh and lived among us. This is the one about a child named Jesus who is Immanuel – God with us. This is the Christ, the one promised so long ago, the one who has fulfilled the Scriptures.

This is the Christmas that celebrates Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, of whom the angels in heaven sang, the shepherds in their fields abandoned their flocks, the wise men from the east came to worship. These are all nice images of the birth of Jesus. But there was also Herod who wanted Jesus dead, even as a baby; there was Pilate who would want nothing to do with Jesus and there was Caiaphas who wanted to crucify him. This is the Christmas of the Scriptures. It’s a holiday filled with both the joy of birth and the sorrow of death for the baby born in Bethlehem whom we

delight in, will be rejected and put to death outside of Jerusalem before his 34th birthday. And while the wise men and the shepherds rush to witness his birth now, they will desert him when he is hung on the cross.

The Christian Christmas is a sober celebration because the Scriptures remind us of *why* Jesus has come down from heaven to live among us. He has come to save us from our sins, and to save us from death by dying in our place.

This is what Paul is telling Titus about Christmas – the simple truth that Jesus saved us. This is the heart and soul of what the Christmas of the Bible is all about. We need to be saved but we can't do it by ourselves so Jesus was born in order to *save us*. When Paul says, 'he saved us', he means you and me. For to us a child is born, for us a son is given, and for us he came down from heaven.

Jesus saved us, not because we're anything special but because he is merciful. He saved us by the washing of rebirth, that is the renewal of the Holy Spirit which he has given to us in water of our baptism. He saved us, which means we have been given the inheritance of eternal life.

This also reminds us of why Jesus came into the world in the way he did. He might have been born into a wealthy family. He could have been the son of an earthly king, born in the midst of pomp and ceremony, being attended by the best doctors available. Great gifts would have been delivered to him from leaders everywhere.

But Jesus came not to be served but to serve. He wasn't to be honoured by the words of people but to give us honour before his Father in heaven. Jesus didn't come to collect the debt due because of our sins, but in order to pay the price in full.

The birth of Jesus proves that God is willing to go all the way to save us. Later, on the cross, it would be proven again. But now the point is already made at Jesus' birth. Christ is born lower and poorer than anyone to demonstrate that there is no one so poor or so lowly as to be excluded from His kindness and love.

So the time for shopping, cooking, decorating and presents is just about drawn to an end. And that's good because it would be hard to keep up this pace for more than a season. But the other Christmas that is about Christ continues. It continues for 52 weeks during the year. For this Christmas of the Bible, we never grow tired of the family gatherings in His name, receiving of His gifts of grace, the eating of the meal He has prepared for us, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Merry Christmas and amen.