

Merry Christmas! What a splendid time to gather together to rejoice over the birth of the world's savior, Jesus Christ.

Part of my calling to this congregation is to serve the campus pastor to the local colleges. I spend time on the campuses and make myself available to talk to the students and staff there. One spring I noticed a bunch of students wearing t-shirts that just said BLDR.

I did a quick google search and found BLDR was a Fortune 500 Building supply company. "It couldn't be that," I thought to myself. Being somewhat introverted, I just went back to my business and didn't think much about it.

I think Christmas can be somewhat like that for us. We know the decorations to get out; we know who is expecting presents. We know the Christmas story. We love the humble story of a mother giving birth in a stable, and we like to envision angels and shepherds.

But do we ever stop to think of the bigger impact that Christmas has on our lives? Do we think about how it ties into the rest of the story of the Bible and our lives from January to November? We as Christians are changed by God's grace, but how does God's grace appear?

First, 4. It appears through the birth of the God who became one of us (v. 11). Paul writes in his letter to Titus in verse 11, "**For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,**"

This passage tells us the salvation of God appeared as a baby. Jesus is true God and His birth tells us that God was not content to leave us alone. Jesus as God in the flesh tells us that God came to carry our sins and bear our sorrows. Because of Christmas, we don't have to ask, "What if God was one of us?" He truly became one of us in that manger in Bethlehem so many years ago.

But so often we are tempted to leave Jesus in the manger. The manger scenes are beautiful and evoke memories of past years. The ornaments remind us of a simpler time when our biggest problems were what we would get for Christmas. But we want Jesus to stay a baby. Babies don't talk back. Babies don't tell you what to do. Babies don't know your sins and addictions. Let's just keep things nostalgic and Hallmark movie perfect and not think about our problems.

But the nativity was hardly the picture-perfect scene that our society paints us. Mary and Joseph were the talk of the town as even back then, they knew where babies came from. The road to Bethlehem was long and hard, especially for a very pregnant woman. When the baby came there were no epidurals, no hand sanitizer, no ob-gyn.

Yet that's how the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people. That first Christmas Eve was not a Thomas Kinkade painting, but that's okay because it mirrors our lives which are hardly paradise. This is the salvation worked for you.

Second, grace— 3. It appears through the life of Jesus who lived the perfect life (v. 12). Why did Jesus come to this earth? Paul continues in verse 12, this grace of God is “...**training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,**”

The magic of Christmastime is that the birth of the Christ child transports us back to fond memories of our childhood. Paul says the same thing, that the grace of God makes us into children again, but not in the way you think.

We remember the good of our childhoods but forget the bad. We forget how hard it was to wait for Christmas. We forget how upset we were when dad took away dessert when we insulted mom. But throughout our childhoods we were being trained by our parents to be mature adults.

In Christ, we are made children of God, and our Heavenly Father is teaching us to live the life of a Christian. Luther explains it this way: “Rather, [Jesus] requires a heart and a life which exist in His grace and which fear other ways and life outside of His grace.” Christmas means we renounce our ungodliness and worldly passions and live sober, righteous, and godly lives here and now.

Fortunately for us, Jesus didn’t stay a baby. We look to the life of Jesus as that perfect example of shunning ungodliness and worldly passions and living a self-controlled, upright, and godly life.

If Joseph left the family in Bethlehem and Herod slaughtered Jesus with the other baby boys, Jesus’ death would not have saved us. Jesus needed to fulfill all righteousness by living the perfect life for you. He was the perfect child obeying Mary and Joseph. He was the perfect teenager. Parents, can you believe it, a perfect teenager? He overcame every temptation for you, and He suffered for you. His ministry was perfect as He demonstrated a self-controlled, upright, and godly life to the people of His day.

Not only does Jesus provide us a perfect example, through faith, that perfect example is credited to us. Jesus’ life is just as important as His birth in delivering us the grace of God.

Third, grace—2. It appears through the death of Jesus who paid the price (v. 14). We skip ahead to verse 14. Paul writes that Jesus “...**gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.**”

The cradle had the cross as its goal. The carpenter’s son would be hoisted upon roughhewn wood. Instead of pounding nails into boards as Jesus likely did throughout His childhood, nails would be pounded into him. The king born in Bethlehem would be crowned with a headdress of thorns rather than gold. The Lamb of God born among livestock would be sacrificed at Passover.

This Christ child was born, lived, and died for you. Not simply so you can keep living life the way you always have, but so that you can abandon your lawless

ways and become God's treasured possession, a purified person zealous for good works.

Luther remarks that this passage is pure good news. This is the Gospel. He writes: "What else is the Gospel than the preaching that Christ gave Himself for us, to redeem us from sin, so that all who believe it will surely also be redeemed?"

You see, sin does two things. First, it takes you captive so you're incapable of doing anything good. Second, it puts you to work building the devil's kingdom. It's hard work being a sinner!

But Jesus was born, lived the perfect life, and died a sacrificial death to free you from that lifestyle of lawlessness. You are now freed not to live business as usual, but to rejoice in a lifestyle of serving Him and serving those around you. As His own possession, you are regularly fed with forgiveness flowing from His Holy Word and Sacrament.

Finally, grace—1. It appears through the resurrection of Jesus whose return we await (v. 13). Paul writes in verse 13 that we are "**waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,**" Jesus not only died, but He rose again, empowering us as well to walk in newness of life by the Holy Spirit. The resurrection proves that the Father accepted Jesus' sacrifice and your sins are truly forgiven. He ascended to heaven and even now is ruling the universe as we await His second coming.

This Christmas story has a goal in mind. Jesus was born, lived, died, and was raised again so that you could come along for the ride. So many of our friends and neighbors are terrified of death. They truly don't know what's going to happen to them. They don't know if there's an afterlife, and if there is one, where they are going. They hope they've done enough good to make it to the pearly gates.

We as Christians know the reason why God is going to let us into heaven. By believing that this Christ child is your Savior: that He was born for you, lived for you, died for you, and was raised for you, by trusting this Savior, we can have confidence that He will take us to be with Him on the day we die.

It's not because of anything we've done, but because of everything God has done for us. We can eagerly await with hope the return of Christ, and we can use the time in between to gather with fellow Christians, help others, and be zealous for good works. CHRISTMAS MARKS THE BEGINNING OF JESUS SAVING US THROUGH HIS BIRTH, LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION.

BLDR. You maybe wondered what that meant. I did too. I finally asked one of the students, and they used it as a chance to share their Christian faith. The story of God's grace is played out through the Birth, Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ. All four are necessary, you can't omit even one of them. Thank God for His Son Jesus who won salvation for us, and it all started at Christmas. Amen!