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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
December 18, 2016
4th Sunday in Advent

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 7:10-14; Matthew 1:18-25

Hymns: 62; 95; 108; 645:5 (73:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Romans 1:1-7

“Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated to the gospel of God ² which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, ³ concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, ⁴ *and* declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. ⁵ Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, ⁶ among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; ⁷ To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God Our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: More than a simple greeting

When people wrote letters in the days of the apostles they always began with a simple greeting in which they identified themselves, and politely greeted those whom they were addressing in the letter.

However, in Paul's epistles we don't find simple greetings. They are much more than simple greetings. Messages of grace are found right from the start of Paul's epistles. And that is certainly what we find in our text this morning. Our text is the greeting or opening verses of Paul's epistle to the Christians in Rome. Within this greeting we find wonderful truths concerning how --

THEME: Christ Comes into the World.

The first truth concerning Christ' coming which we draw from Paul's greeting to the Romans is that Christ comes --

I. As Promised through the Prophets.

This isn't just a random statement. It's not a throwaway line. It speaks to the legitimacy of Jesus the Babe of Bethlehem as being the Christ. From the beginning of His earthly life Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. Our Old Testament lesson this morning was fulfilled in Jesus' birth of the Virgin Mary. That was only the beginning. One after another the scriptures were fulfilled in Jesus' life beginning with His infancy. The prophets foretold that the Christ would come from the line of David, and so it was legally fulfilled, as Joseph was of the lineage of David. The prophets foretold that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem, and so it was fulfilled. The scriptures foretold Herod's failed attempt to kill the young child Jesus. Prophecy also foretold that the Lord would call His Son out of Egypt, where Joseph had fled with Mary and Jesus to escape the murderous plot of King Herod.

This morning we are especially focused on the Isaiah prophecy of our Old Testament lesson that was also cited in our gospel lesson. This prophecy foretold the miracle of Jesus' conception and birth that also led to the dual nature of the Christ that was so essential to our salvation. Jesus came --

II. As the Son of David and the Son of God.

In the introduction to this epistle Paul was informing the Christians in Rome that He was writing to them concerning God's gospel of our salvation and --

Romans 1:3-4 “concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, ⁴ *and* declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”

Our Gospel lesson and Old Testament lesson both present this truth of the dual nature of Christ. In both of those Scriptures the fact that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary is an important element of this truth.

The fact that Jesus was born of Mary makes the humanity of Jesus evident. He was born an infant small, and helpless dependent upon Mary and Joseph, born in lowly circumstances. He was truly human in every way. This is in no way like the incidents in the Old Testament when the Angel of the Lord, who is the Son of God, appeared in a human form for a special occasion; such as when the Lord visited Abraham concerning the birth of Isaac and the judgment that would befall Sodom and Gomorrah; or when He appeared to Jacob and wrestled with him, leaving Jacob with a dislocated hip the blessing of a new name, Israel. On those occasions the Son of God only assumed the appearance of a man and then only for a short time.

When Jesus was born the Christ came into the world and the divine took upon Himself the human nature. This was not only for a time, but forevermore. Jesus, the Christ, is God and Man to this day, and will remain true God and true Man for our blessing, for our salvation, into all eternity.

Ahh, but then we do not simply confess that Jesus was born of Mary. We confess that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. Born of the Virgin Jesus was born without the inherited sin that infects us, and brings death upon us all. Equally important is the fact that Jesus was conceived by the power and working of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is both true God and true Man, and so He is our Savior.

This is the truth that challenges human reason, and is challenged by many in this world, even many within the visible church, including the Lutheran Church. The reality of this world, and how babies are born is allowed to overrule the clear teaching of Holy Scripture. It is interesting for us to note that in the verses of our text in which

Paul states that this epistle to the Christians in Rome is about he states that it includes evidence that Jesus is true God and true Man, and Paul points to the wonder of Jesus' resurrection as confirming the truth of Jesus divine nature. And again the power of the Holy Spirit is cited as being involved in Jesus' resurrection, that He is declared to be the Son of God with power! Jesus is the Son of David and the Son of God. He came into this world --

III. To Bring Us God's Grace.

Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome:

Romans 1:5-7 "Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, ⁶ among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; ⁷ To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul speaks of grace not only that came to him as an apostle, but to the nations of the world to whom Paul was to deliver the grace of God found in obedience to the faith. That is the Christian faith, the teachings of the gospel that are intended by God for all nations.

This gospel reveals that for Jesus to be the propitiating sacrifice for the sins of the world, that sacrifice that truly satisfies the debt of our sin and appeases the wrath of God, it was necessary that the blood He shed for our redemption be both holy and precious. It had to be more precious than any man's blood could be. It had to be of infinite worth for Jesus had to atone for the sin of the whole world. He could only do that as our brother in the flesh. He could only do that as the true an eternal Son of God. This is the measure of God's grace toward a fallen mankind.

God's grace toward us continues in that we are the called of Jesus Christ. Many people who celebrate Christmas don't have clue, not even a clue concerning the wonder of salvation that fills our heart with joy this Christmas season. What is troubling is that they may sing Christmas hymns like *Joy to the World*, or *Silent Night*, or a Christmas song like "*Mary, Did You Know*" the speaks of the wonders of the Christ and the salvation found in His name, and they still don't know Jesus as Lord and Savior. Are we so much

more intelligent? No, that isn't it at all. Are we naturally more spiritual? Again, not at all! We are called to faith in Christ Jesus by God the Father through the message of this glorious gospel of the Babe of Bethlehem. It is all because of God's grace that has come to us by Jesus coming into the world that we are saved; God's grace that we are also called of Jesus Christ, called to faith by the power of the Holy Spirit working through this gospel message.

Jesus' coming continues to add to this grace. Paul includes this marvel of grace that the believers in Rome are called to be saints. To be called a saint is indeed such a special gift of grace that we may have a difficult time comprehending it. In fact we are called to be saints every bit as much as the believers in Rome for this gift of grace extends to all who believe. To be called a saint by God very simply means that God says that you are one of His holy ones. This status as saints of God boggles the mind because we all know our sin, sin that is present with us in our lives every day. That we are saints remains true in spite of the fact that we daily sin much. This grace is not about perfection in daily living. It is about our status before God. By faith we have been adorned with Jesus' righteousness. By grace through faith our sins are no longer held against us. By grace through faith God declares us to be holy and righteous before Him.

The result of this gracious status is the familiar blessing that concludes our text: **“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** Yes, you hear this as the blessing of God before every sermon. This blessing is real and true because of the message of grace that God brings us in His Word concerning the coming of Jesus as the Christ, our Savior. That is the message you should expect to dominate each and every sermon you hear. Every day we need this grace, His forgiving grace. Every day the Lord would assure us that we live in His peace, peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Our salvation is assured because the Son of God came into this world as Jesus, true God and true Man, our Redeemer, the Babe of Bethlehem!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.