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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
December 25, 2016  
Christmas Day

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-9; John 1:1-14  
Hymns: 136; 708; 76; 92; 87; 89:1,5; 94; 97

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

Sermon Text: Titus 2:11-14

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, <sup>12</sup>teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, <sup>13</sup>looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup>who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

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

In Christ Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: The Meaning of Christmas

We have so many sentiments in our society about the true meaning of Christmas that the actual true meaning Christmas has been lost for most people, and subdued in us all. And I am convinced of that. We are influenced by the world's spin on the meaning and significance of Christmas that we, Christians, place too much importance on the superficial worldly traditions surrounding Christmas, maybe sometimes even more than we do on the facts of our Savior's birth. The wonder of that birth impacts the lives of each and every one of us.

For this reason in our mid-week Advent meditations we focused our attention on “*The Miraculous Wonders of the Unique Christ-Child.*”

On this Christmas morning may the Spirit guide us to appreciate --

## **THEME: The Miraculous Wonders Manifest in Jesus' Birth.**

Let us first consider

### **I. The Wonder of Grace Revealed to the World.**

A very simple statement opens our text that deserves our careful consideration.

**Titus 2:11** “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.”

We may not always appreciate the magnitude of this fact. The birth of Jesus is the grace of God that brings salvation. In Jesus' birth this grace appeared in the world for all to see. This event of Jesus' birth was so well hidden that most people in Bethlehem didn't know it happened, or if they knew that a baby had been born in the stable behind the local inn it was more about that event happening in the stable than who this Child was or what grace He brought into the world.

Even the angels' message, as glorious as it was, had an audience of only a few shepherds. Even if the shepherds told all the people they could about Baby Jesus, the news of Jesus' birth was still localized and people simply “marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds” (Luke 2:18).

And yet our text tells us that “**the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.**” The Son of God came down to earth, taking on human flesh and blood. Jesus, the Son of God incarnate, appeared on the earth as our brother. “**The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men!**”

But the whole world didn't know what they were or were not seeing. What it was that should have been a marvel before their eyes was not recognized as anything more than the birth of a baby in rather unusually humble circumstances. John in the first chapter of his gospel wrote:

**John 1:4-5, 10** In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. ... <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.”

He appeared for all the world to see! But “**the world did not know Him.**” The world didn't know Him in His birth, in His life, in His death, or even today as we celebrate His birth and life. That is the world we live in, the world that influences us whether we want it to or not, whether we

are aware of the world's influence or not. And that is why **we** need to focus on the wonder of the Christ-child's birth. Jesus' birth was unique not only in manner but in power and grace. In Jesus' birth the **grace** of God has appeared to all men.

## **II. It is a Wonder of Grace found in our Hearts and Lives.**

This wonder of grace does not take hold of our hearts by our will, but by the power of the Holy Spirit working within us.

**Titus 2:12-13** "Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, <sup>13</sup> looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."

The Holy Spirit works a wonder of grace in our hearts with the news of Jesus' birth. It is indeed "**good tidings of great joy**," but it isn't only a matter of being happy or experiencing joy in our hearts. Joy of heart is an attribute of a changed heart, one in which the power of sin and darkness is obliterated. That Spirit worked joy is what empowers the "**denying of ungodliness and worldly lusts**." I think we all realize from personal experience that this denying of ungodliness and worldly lusts is a lot easier said than done. We are born with sinful desires. It is a part of the corrupt human nature. We are selfish. We indulge our sinful thoughts and desires, perhaps even telling ourselves that as long as we don't follow through with sinful actions it's not so bad to entertain sinful thoughts. We don't even admit to ourselves this toying with temptation is ungodly.

The Wonder of God's grace that appeared to us and all men in Jesus' birth takes our thoughts in a different direction. Our lives as well. By the power of the Holy Spirit we will endeavor to avoid sin in our lives. Instant gratification that characterizes so much of our society is often no more than the gratification of the flesh. The wonder of Christ's birth gives us cause to look at our actions and deny the ungodly so that we live soberly, meaning thoughtfully, and considerate of the spiritual implications of our choices in life. This includes choices that in themselves may not be sinful, but may distract us from serving the Lord, and detract from our testimony as children of God.

The wonder of Jesus' birth has given a new and spiritual direction to our lives. Some years ago I heard a line in a movie that was mocking the superficial nature of life in our materialistic society, and it stuck with me as being all too accurate in describing the driving force in too many lives. The one selfish character played by Danny DeVito declared "**Whoever dies with the most toys wins!**" It was a funny line, but it also had a

message about the vanity of pursuing the material and temporal at the expense of the spiritual.

What is our life focus to be? Jesus' appearing in Bethlehem leads us to focus upon the next appearing of our Lord Jesus. Even as the shepherds were blessed to see Jesus their Savior in the manger, so we all shall see the glory of His coming. That is what should possess our hearts and direct our lives.

This happens in the Christian's heart as he swells on

### **III. on the Wonder of Grace of Jesus' Birth.**

Jesus --

**Titus 2:14** "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works."

That was why Jesus came into the world. That is what it means when we say that He saved us. He redeemed us, not only from the curse of the law, but from the power of sin. When Jesus came into the world it was God's gracious goal for us that sin should not be the power that controlled our lives, but rather that we be set free from the enslavement of sin.

We were totally contaminated by sin, foul in every way. Jesus purged us from sin's foul nature so that we could be His. Even when we still sinners, He desired to possess us as His own special people. He redeemed us not so that we would be free to serve our flesh, but to be zealous of good works. The wonder of grace of Jesus' birth is that we desire to do those things that glorify our Savior and serve our neighbor.

This is the wonder of grace that comes to us because Jesus was born on Christmas Day. This is what it means that in Jesus' birth "**the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.**"

**AMEN.**

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Amen. (Romans 15:13)