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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
January 13, 2019
1st Sunday after Epiphany

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 42:1-7, Luke 3:15-17, 21-22
Hymns: 363; 343:1-4; 391; 343:7 (24:1-3)

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

Sermon Text: Titus 3:4-7

⁴But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, ⁵not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (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: Epiphany Season, a time to observe the glory of Christ.

Last Sunday we observed the wonder of the guiding star that led the wise men to the child Jesus. The glory of the Savior was revealed as the Savior of the world, also of the Gentiles! In the coming weeks we shall continue to observe Jesus' glory as it is revealed to us in Holy

Scripture. This morning's gospel lesson featured Jesus being baptized by John in the Jordan River. Jesus' glory was revealed by God the Father proclaiming His pleasure in the Man Jesus, declaring that Jesus was not just a Man but was in fact the Beloved Son of God. Then we also read how the Holy Spirit, having assumed the form of dove, descended upon Jesus, abiding with Him. Yes, this is a Trinitarian message, the Triune God is the God of our salvation Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And, yes, we see the clear declaration of the divine nature of Jesus being presented. This wonder of Jesus' glory was observed by John the Baptist and John testified of this event as evidence that Jesus is the Christ of God!

There is more for us to appreciate in this event that makes it worthy of its place in our worship year after year. It lies in the truth associated with Jesus being baptized and how this event was the public presentation, one might say inauguration of Jesus in His active ministry as the Christ. So then let us seek the Spirit's guidance as we, on the basis of our text from Titus, consider --

**THEME: The Compounding of Grace Revealed
in Christ's Appearance.**

The opening words of our text lead us to appreciate exactly what we do see in Jesus coming into the world.

I. The Kindness and Love of God Appeared.

In that first verse of our text we are told so much about God's reaction to the plight of a sinful mankind. This verse does not speak of the wrath of God being showered down upon a sinful mankind, but rather "*when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared.*" (v.4) We know how that kindness and love of God appeared. It appeared in the incarnation of the Son of God. However the words of that first versed are not speaking to us of the Son of God acting alone. It is speaking to us of God the Father who so loved the world, the whole world, a world full of sinners, that He gave His only begotten Son. (John

3:16) The expression “God our Savior” is so rich with the message of God’s love and grace, for it speaks to us of God’s eternal plan to save us. Reading that His kindness and love *appeared* leads us to properly personify this kindness and love of God with the person of Jesus Christ.

Is it right for us to equate this verse with the Savior’s birth? Of course it is, for that is when the Son of God became incarnate that He might be the Savior of the world, but let’s not limit these words to that the event of Jesus’ birth. For the next thirty years Jesus would not be easily identified as that Savior. After the holy family’s return from Egypt they lived in Nazareth, and Jesus grew and learned to be a builder or carpenter working alongside Joseph. He was seen as a good boy, well-liked by those who knew Him, who grew in favor with others in the community even as He grew in stature and wisdom. (Luke 2:52) However, it is doubtful that many beyond Mary and Joseph possessed that awareness that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God.

But then the event that is featured on this first Sunday after Epiphany took place, and Jesus went to John by the Jordan River that He might be baptized by John, and the manifestation of Jesus’ glory as the Christ the Son of God truly began. Jesus was revealed as the promised Messiah who came into the world to secure for us a perfectly fulfilled righteousness and to be that atoning sacrifice for our sins, for the sins of the whole world.

The kindness and love of God appeared and --

II. He Saved Us.

Our text spells out this grace very well in these words: “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.” (v. 5a) It was not by our works of righteousness. As children of God we ought to understand that truth very well, but because of the pride of our sinful flesh we are still pulled back time and again into thinking that somehow we were a cut above the

rest of the world, and that is at least part of why we were saved. That is not the case, not in the slightest. The verse immediately preceding our text speaks of our natural state. *“For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.”* (Titus 3:3) Foolish - *“The fool has said in his heart there is no God!”* (Psalm 14:1). By nature we were that kind of foolish. We were the kind of foolish that thought, “It is none of God’s business how I choose to live my life. I will live it as I see fit!” Disobedient! Deceived into thinking that we too could be like God knowing both good and evil. What we think we know is that my evil is not worthy of death as much as your evil is, not as long as I am nice to people most of the time, or sort of nice by human standards. We are jealous, hateful, hold grudges, and dare to think we deserve to go to heaven on the basis of our own merit and worthiness. We are only fooling ourselves. *“ALL our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.”* (Isaiah 64:6)

It was according to His mercy that He saved us. We cannot save ourselves. **He** saved us. He saved us not because He detected some redeeming quality within us, but according to His mercy. He had pity on a miserable sinner like me, and for me, for you, He sent His only begotten Son into the flesh that we might live through Jesus. Every Sunday we seek the Lord’s mercy upon us, mercy that He would forgive us our sins, mercy that He would help us and strengthen us as we make our pilgrimage through this valley of the shadow of death. And what we find is:

*Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed,
Because His compassions fail not.*

²³ *They are new every morning;*

Great is Your faithfulness.

²⁴ *“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,*

“Therefore I hope in Him!” (Lamentations 3:22-24)

III. The Washing of Regeneration

Yes, here we find a connection to baptism brought to us in our text. But does this then connect back to Jesus' baptism? Did Jesus' baptism play a role in our salvation, the salvation which we also receive through baptism? Yes, indeed it does! We could and indeed we should comprehend the same truth that John the Baptist perceived. **Jesus was not in need of a baptism for repentance.** Jesus did not have any sins that needed to be washed away, not even one! However, Jesus' response to John is well noted for it speaks to us once again of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Jesus came to be baptized of John in the Jordan River that Jesus might fulfill all righteousness. It is Jesus' perfect righteousness that is credited to us through faith in His name. By coming to be baptized Jesus was doing that which God desires of us, that we should be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So then this is important for us to note on two points, the first that for Jesus to fulfill all righteousness for our salvation, He too was to be baptized. Secondly, it lays before us incontrovertible evidence that this is the will of God for us and for our salvation that we too should be baptized, and it is all about the grace that comes to us in Baptism.

Baptism is the washing of regeneration. It is a new birth, a new beginning in which we receive the renewing of the Holy Spirit. It is life, spiritual life that can only come to us by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that makes alive in Christ Jesus, our Lord. We who were dead in our trespasses and sins He has made alive, spiritually alive that we might live to His glory and have the hope of everlasting life. (Ephesians 2:2,4-7) This is the gracious good will of God for us that is evident in the appearing of the Christ. It begins with the wondrous cleansing power of baptism, as Ananias declared to that chief of sinners Saul, saying to him, *"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."* (Acts 22:16) So we also have been washed by

those cleansing waters connected to the Word of God and used by God's command. Our sins have been washed away. Whenever the devil would try to drive doubt or fear into your hearts, return to the certain assurance you have in knowing that you were baptized, for there it is confirmed, your sins are washed away.

This also impacts our daily life, for the power of baptism brings us into Jesus' death and resurrection. And so Paul wrote to the Romans of Baptism's significance and power; *"Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."* (Romans 6:3-4)

This in no way suggests that our baptism merely strengthens our personal determination so that by the power of **our** will we find the strength within ourselves to suddenly be good people. This power is in the renewing of the Holy Spirit. We are now temples of the Spirit of our God. While we are not to defile God's temple with sinful lives, the strength to walk in newness of life to the glory of our Savior is found in the powerful working of the Holy Spirit. Just as He was poured into our hearts in baptism, so He continues to strengthen us as we abide in His Word, and hear the gospel. As we listen and learn more of the depth of God's love for us we are empowered by the Spirit to say "NO" to sin and "YES" to righteousness. The Spirit leads us to walk in love towards God and our neighbor. The Spirit leads us to walk through the trials and tribulations of this life, knowing that in Christ we have the hope of everlasting life.

So the Epiphany lesson for us is quite marvelous. As we consider the glory of our Savior we are led to praise the Lord not only because of His glory but how the revelation of that glory has led to our salvation. Let us remember that all this goes back to *"when the kindness and the love*

of God our Savior toward man appeared HE SAVED US! (v.
4) Praise His glorious name!

AMEN.

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