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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
December 27, 2020
1st Sunday after Christmas

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 45:20-25, Luke 2:25-40
Hymns: 92; 85:1,3,4, 14,15; 108: 1,5,6,8; 97:1,4

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

Sermon Text: Colossians 3:12-17

Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. ¹⁴But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. ¹⁵And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. ¹⁷And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (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, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Getting into the Spirit of Christmas

I was trying to pick up on the words of a popular modern Christmas carol, “What Christmas means to me.” I wasn’t able to follow it very well, but I think it focused a great deal on the externals of Christmas and the feelings that come from decorating with candles and sending cards and Christmas wishes. These are things that seem to make a lot of people happy. I enjoy them as much as anyone. I’ve been playing Christmas music for weeks. Our home is decorated inside and out with lights and candles and Christmas art and manger scenes and I enjoy it all. Well, maybe that new flashing lights tree I bought not so much, but the rest of it is great! But then I won’t quite go the next step. I won’t say, “This is what Christmas means to me!” All these externals lead me to smile more, and yes, I am one of those people that actually drive around town looking at other people’s lights and decorations, but this isn’t what Christmas means to me. Smiles, yes, but the joy in my heart and the true meaning of Christmas with its impact on my life, that’s a little deeper, actually quite a lot deeper.

So if we are going to talk about getting into the spirit of Christmas where should our thoughts be going? You know where the True Spirit of Christmas, the Holy Spirit would lead us. The Holy Spirit leads us to Bethlehem of Judea, to the manger in that stable, to the love of God for a sinful mankind appearing in the form of a humble little Child who was and is and ever shall be the Son of God, our Redeemer. May the Holy Spirit lead us to--

THEME: Living in the Spirit of Christmas.

The Holy Spirit gives meaning and direction to our Christmas observance. And yes, that includes --

I. Putting on Your Christmas Attire.

We can think of all kinds of different Christmas attire that we might wear. We might be going to a party, and the prescribed attire is “Ugly Christmas sweaters.” What fun! But then you may be invited to another celebration that specifies formal attire, a “black tie” occasion. Even simply coming to church for Christmas calls for some thought about how I want to present myself. I want to be perceived as being respectful as we gather to celebrate Jesus’ birth. I wear nicer clothes, and I want them not only to be appropriate to the occasion but also I’m careful to pick out and put on things that

go with how I desire to be perceived. I don't want anyone to get the impression that I think our spiritual observance of Christ's birth is frivolous. My tie won't be a Santa Claus with flashing lights on his hat kind of Christmas tie.

The first point we ought to pick up on in our text is that we have been chosen for this honor of knowing Jesus and celebrating His birth. Compare yourselves to the shepherds who received that special birth announcement from the angels. So we have received a special invitation from the Holy Spirit through the gospel calling us to faith, calling us to be children of God. I know the shepherds didn't change clothes before hurrying to see and worship Jesus. But we are in a little different situation, and they did adorn themselves spiritually for the occasion.

That is what the Spirit is exhorting us to do in our text.

Colossians 3:12-14 Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. ¹⁴But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

The Greek word translated here "put on" is the word for getting dressed. As we get ourselves spiritually dressed to live in the spirit of Christmas what are we going to wear? What are we going to put on? What do we want others to see when they look at us so that we look like the elect of God who love Jesus?

Let's start with "**tender mercies,**" or **compassion**. If we are to dress in the spirit of Christmas it really does have to start with compassion for others. The Lord looked down on us in our fallen state, a state that leads to certain death and eternal suffering, and His heart went out to us. His desire was to deliver us from death. Dress for Christmas with compassion for the downtrodden, the needy, the hurting, and especially the lost. If we don't feel compassion for the lost and the suffering how can we be living in the Christmas spirit.

Let's add a layer of **kindness**. Feeling for others, and then just walking away doesn't help. The Lord felt compassion for us and at Christmas the Son of God came down to earth to be our brother to save our lives. Compassion led to action, an action of great kindness toward us. May we practice kindness toward others that we might be adorned in the spirit of Christmas.

How about putting on and wearing some **humility**. It is so easy, in fact human nature, to put ourselves first. Our feelings, our needs our accomplishments all lie at the center of our consciousness. It is hard to put others before self, to see others as more important than self. That is what Scripture encourages us to do. "*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.*" (Philippians 2:3) Better than myself! That is what Jesus did when He became incarnate. He put our need before His own, and then "*humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross!*" (Philippians 2: 8) Dare we think of others as better than ourselves?

Then we can add some adornments of being **meek**, not pushy, **enduring** or longsuffering; that means being patient with others in their shortcomings. It's good to remember that nobody's perfect except Jesus Himself. We goof up too, meaning we **sin** in thought, word, and deed. And we should take the 2x4 out of our eye before we try to take the sliver out of the eye of our neighbor. We ought to bear one another's burdens. We all have sinful faults that we may acknowledge, but still struggle with throughout our lives. Dress in the spirit of Christmas; bear one another's burdens.

We can't forget to put on **forgiveness**. There is forgiveness the way the world forgives, and then there is forgiveness as Christ forgives. The forgiveness of this world is cheap forgiveness. It's limited in degree. And in frequency, and qualified by the judgment of another's worthiness, or if they can make it worthwhile for us to go to all the trouble of forgiving them. Would we gain a benefit by forgiving another? That is all part of the world's manner of forgiveness. That's not how Christ forgave us. He completely removed our great load of sin and took it away forever. He did this at great personal cost to Himself, not personal benefit. **We** are the beneficiaries of Jesus' forgiveness. When we keep in mind and

heart how much He has forgiven us, how freely He has forgiven us, what He sacrificed to forgive us, then we will find the love to forgive as He has forgiven us. It comes from Him as a gift to us, not just the forgiveness but the strength to forgive others.

That brings us to the Christian trait that ties everything together, **love**. Not the romantic love played up in some Christmas movies, but that pure **agape love** that expects nothing in return, but genuinely cares for others as Christ cared for us and gave Himself for us.

That is our God-given Christmas outfit that He would have us put on and wear every day that all may see us living in the Christmas spirit all year long.

Now that we are all dressed up, where are we going to go from here? --

II. Possessing Christmas Spirituality.

Colossians 3:15-16 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

These two verses of our text really take us to our place in the Christian congregation. That is why Paul reminds us that we were called into one body. We are here together with others. The peace of Christ we possess in our hearts is shared with other fellow believers. We rejoice together and are thankful for the salvation that has appeared before all men in the incarnation of the Son of God in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. That isn't saying I've learned enough of this. It's saying I want more, I desire to grow in grace and in the knowledge of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is what we desire, isn't it? To hear the Word, to live in the Word, to have the Word of our God become a fountain of life within our hearts that flows with the lifegiving waters of life for others as well as ourselves.

The word of Christ dwells richly in all wisdom in the teaching and admonishing of our fellow Christian, in the singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. We sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord. Grace in our hearts, that is kindness and joy that is contagious. If we are living in the spirit of Christmas let's begin in church. We gather here because we all love Jesus, and we love to praise His holy name, and we love to be together with those who love Jesus. It builds us all up in faith, and in the joy of believing. It helps strengthen and encourage us to take our faith out of the church doors into our daily life routine.

That is where our text leads us as we are living in the Christmas spirit.

Colossians 3:17 And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Whatever we do, **whatever** we do, whether that has to do with work or business, or if it is our family life, or personal friendships, or recreation, we are dressed in our Christmas attire. We behave like we are dressed. People see what we do, what we say, how we react to situations in life: from obeying the laws of the state, or how we treat other people, or how we respond when others are rude to us, and we are wearing our Christmas attire. It all reflects on Christ. All those things that make up life, and in all those things it is our desire flowing from a heart of faith that we glorify Jesus. There are times when it flows easily that we glorify the Lord. There are other times when we fail to remember that in all things we are blessed by the Lord.

Look in the mirror. When we look in the mirror of the law and see our own sins and shortcomings, we realize how blessed we are to have a Savior born in Bethlehem. Then when we look in the mirror of the gospel, and we see how the Lord has adorned us with His righteousness, it will be our desire to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God, through Jesus.

That's really what living in the Christmas spirit comes down to, that in everything we do, words and actions, people see we are thanking God for His grace and love in Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem!

AMEN.

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