

# Grace Has Appeared

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Date: 25 December 2006

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[ 0 : 00 ] As we stand, let us pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem to die and rise again for our salvation.

We pray that the good news of Jesus would gladden our hearts as we hear your word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Please be seated. Amen. Well, it would be good if you turn to Titus 2, 11 through 15, these four or five verses that are here.

And if you notice in the bulletin, this is called a talk, and that's a little cue from the person who wrote the bulletin that this is supposed to be a very short sermon. So that's my reminder.

So I will try to do that. On this Christmas morning, we're actually starting 12 days of big celebration. This is a season of great joy.

That's what we heard read in the Luke reading. The angel says, Don't be afraid to the shepherds. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people, because today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you.

[ 1 : 15 ] He is the Messiah, the Lord. And you know that Christmas carols that we sing and parties that we give at this time of year bring joy.

And there is this theme of joy that surrounds Christmas. It's synonymous, the two, Christmas and joy. And in this reading that we heard today from Titus, we hear the reason for that joy.

And it is in verse 11. Very powerful verse. At Jesus' birth, the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all people.

And literally, the Greek says, the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all classes of people, to all types of people, even slaves.

And it is an undeserved grace, this salvation, that can reach any person in any situation. And so you see, the joy of Christmas, what it all comes from in this verse, is the fact that God rescues humanity in this little baby who was born in a very humble stable in Bethlehem.

[ 2 : 29 ] And that's where joy comes from. It's not sort of a state of mind because we're all together. It's not because of the fact that here's the one time a year we're nice to one another.

It all comes from that day where God brings his rescue. And you know that throughout the Old Testament, as I was telling the children, God pointed to this.

Through God's word in the Old Testament, God is known as the one who rescues people. He rescues Noah through the flood. He rescues the people of Israel from Egypt through the Red Sea.

And before that, he rescued Joseph in Egypt. He rescues King David many times from his enemies. He is one that through the prophets, God has said, I will come one day and perfectly rescue you people.

In fact, God, one who is God with you, will come for you. And what happens in Bethlehem with that little baby is that the gift of rescue is made perfect and final.

[ 3 : 41 ] You know that word appeared in verse 11 means that what was invisible or what was hidden is suddenly visible for all to see.

Just like the unwrapping of a present, which I was talking to the children. As I was working on this sermon yesterday morning, I was looking at the North Shore Mountains. And during that, during about two or three hours, there was actually clarity in the atmosphere around Vancouver.

We haven't seen it for a couple months, but I was actually able to look at the North Shore Mountains and see snow on them. It was just perfectly clear. The rain had washed out any smog.

And the snow on it made the mountains seem very, very clear in relief. And about an hour or two later, it was all completely obscured again.

Well, that word appearance is really perfectly illustrated by being able to see those mountains clearly. Having them been under fog for a long time in rain and then again later, but to see that window where there is clarity.

[ 4 : 50 ] That's the word appearing. God's saving work was clouded. We didn't know what it would look like. And in this baby, people could actually touch and hear and see God's gift finally revealed in the most clear way possible to humanity.

That's the wonder of God's salvation appearing, his grace appearing in Jesus. And I don't know if you remember this story from the Bible, but shortly after the reading we just heard, eight days after Jesus is born, he's brought to the temple.

And there, there's a man named Simeon. And Simeon was promised years before, he's quite an old man, he's promised that he would see the salvation of God one day. He would see what had been obscured for so many centuries.

And here's what it says in Luke. Simeon took this little baby Jesus into his arms, and he praised God, saying, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

In other words, I can die in peace. Because my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations, it is a light for the revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.

[ 6 : 13 ] You know, that's a song, it's called the Song of Simeon, of great joy, that he writes, because he is overjoyed at the thought that he could die in peace because he was looking at God's rescue.

He was looking at God's rescue as he was holding this little baby in his arms. You see what that's saying? A powerful thing. In Jesus, we see our rescue.

It's not a philosophy. It's not a way of life, a system of beliefs, or special knowledge. It is actually Jesus Christ himself, who was born as a baby and grew up to die for the sins of the whole world.

In this man, we see the gift of God's rescue revealed for the first time, and it is a perfect appearance that will last forever.

Because Jesus takes us to the place of safety with God by forgiving our sins. He provides for our future as well. He himself.

[ 7 : 18 ] And that's why if you jump down to verse 13, you're going to see the word appearance a second time. It says, we live this way, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

You see, not only is there the past appearance of God's perfect gift of salvation, there is a future appearance that all Christians long for. It is the glory of Jesus, our great God and Savior.

I don't know if you notice this in this verse. It's a remarkable verse because it clearly says that Jesus is God and he is our Savior as well. And it says that we, along with the whole world, all of humanity, will see Jesus in all his glory.

And he will bring with him a new heaven and a new earth. We will perfectly experience the salvation that he has won for us when he came for us in Bethlehem.

I've had several conversations with people about death this last week. A strange time to have it, although a good time as well because, of course, I talk about this blessed hope.

[ 8 : 37 ] And several people have said to me who are near death, I hope you're right about this. And it's poignant for them to say that because that is what Christmas guarantees.

It guarantees that our future is in Jesus' hands. That he will appear, the salvation of God will appear to you and I where we will see him as he is, the glorious one.

Something that is obscured right now by our world and by the fact that he has not come yet. But he will come again. This is the blessed hope the whole Bible points to.

This is the blessed hope we read in the creeds today. It is the blessed hope that is ours in Jesus Christ. And so I want to close by saying that today on Christmas Day, 2006, we actually live between two appearances of God's grace and his salvation.

We look back today on Christmas Day to this incredible gift that God gave in Jesus Christ. But we also look forward because that coming of Jesus guarantees the day that we look ahead to when we will finally see our salvation with our eyes in a more glorious way than Simeon saw himself.

[ 9 : 56 ] And we have to ask ourselves today, what does this have to do with us here on Christmas Day and in the year to come? Well, it tells you and I that our lives and in fact this whole world is surrounded by God's grace.

It is behind us and it is in front of us. And in fact, verse 12 tells us that this grace actually trains us every day how to live in this present age to first of all renounce irreligion as it says in verse 12 or ungodliness and renounce worldly passions.

Those are desires that draw us from God. When we know that God has saved us, this grace, and we place our trust in him, we are able to see what we are saved from.

That we actually are brought away from those things in God. His word uncovers what is opposed to God and God helps us to recognize the desires that are not of his.

But there's a positive aspect. Not only do we renounce because of grace, it actually trains us to live a new life in this world. And he talks about living a sober, upright, godly life.

[ 11 : 11 ] Which we actually say every other week in morning prayer. But sober talks about our relationship with ourselves. Going from being selfish, living for our desires, to actually living for God where he is in control.

And upright is our relationships with one another. Renouncing the devious action and actually living in a way that God directs in our relationships. A way that is upright in our relationships.

It's a new way of living towards one another. And thirdly, that word godly, it involves our relationship with God. It is a sincere and a joyous relationship with God who is our heavenly father because of Jesus.

And so Christmas is not a joyful past event only. It is about grace appearing. Grace that is to come. And grace that actually changes the way that we live here and now.

Verse 14 tells us that Jesus gave himself for us. Why? To redeem us. To free us from sin. Free us to renounce it.

[ 12 : 21 ] And then it says it purifies a people for himself who belong to him. Who are his own. And what are those people like? Well, it ends in verse 14 by saying they are zealous for good deeds.

And I think this is a thing that's wonderful for us to walk away from our service today with. Because grace does not bring a burden on us of good deeds to make us holier than other people who didn't go to church today.

What it does actually is those who receive the grace of Jesus joyfully want to do what he wants. They desire what he desires. They love what he loves.

There is a sense of joy and zeal at being saved by God and being brought into this new relationship of peace with him. And so there is joyous freedom to having one's life shaped by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who has appeared and will appear again.

There is deep hope that goes through every experience of life because all humanity and all creation will see Jesus in all his glory.

[ 13 : 33 ] may the grace of God that has appeared make you zealous and may you know this joy that God has given to us. In his name we pray.

Amen. Amen.