

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
First Sunday after Epiphany, January 9, 2011

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Hymns: 102, 98: 1-2, 76, 99, 85:13-15.

Lessons: Isaiah 40: 1-5, 1 Peter 1: 1-16, Luke 2: 15-20.

Sermon Text: Titus 2: 11-14.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

By now, January 9, almost all traces of Christmas have disappeared. Most businesses by now have cleared out all of their Christmas items and started stocking shelves with Valentine merchandise and even St. Patrick's Day merchandise.

Is it over? Is the message of Christmas that fleeting? Isn't there something about the message of the birth of Jesus Christ – the message of the last six weeks – the season of Advent and Christmas – that is worth remembering and continuing to celebrate?

Christians know that there IS something about the message you heard at Christmas that is worth remembering. That is the enduring message that

THE GRACE OF GOD THAT BRINGS SALVATION
TO ALL PEOPLE HAS APPEARED

- 1. It is the message of God's grace, his undeserved goodness and love.**
- 2. It teaches us to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives.**
- 3. It gives us hope and assurance as we wait for the second coming of Jesus Christ, when he will come "to judge the living and the dead".**

Jesus Christ appeared as an infant, so that he could be fully human as well as fully God. He is, as we confess with Luther's explanation of the Apostle's Creed, "true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary." The words of the Apostolic Creed and the Nicene Creed are words that we believe. They aren't merely some kind of formalistic recitation of mythical words that we say just because we have always said them. That is what we really believe, and teach, and confess.

You saw that Grace of God presented to you and you heard about it at our children's Christmas Service. Grace is God's undeserved love and mercy for sinful mankind. And it is a gift of God. Jesus is God's greatest gift to mankind. We don't deserve it because we are all sinners. But "*... God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*" John 3:16-17.

Is there a single Christmas Hymn in our hymnal that does not speak of that Grace that God showed to mankind? Even the simple ones that speak of the town where Jesus Christ was born, or the angels proclaiming his birth all center on the grace of God in Jesus Christ or sing about the supposedly silent night when he was born. That grace, that love, that mercy that God gave to us is the only way mankind can have salvation. In Bethlehem it appeared for all men, not just for the shepherds. It is the glory of the Lord you heard about in our Old Testament lesson that has been revealed for all men. It is that grace of God in Jesus Christ that is revealed in the Holy Scriptures, particularly in the New Testament. It is there for all men to read and to hear. It is here

for you to hear about and to worship that glory of God every time we schedule a worship service. And this morning the grace of God in Jesus Christ has appeared to you again from his Word.

And how does that grace affect our lives? What effect does Jesus Christ have on your life? You know from God's moral law – summarized in the Ten Commandments – that you are a sinner; that you cannot keep God's law perfectly, and that is what God demands. That is the use or purpose of the law as a mirror for all humans – to show us our sinfulness. But you learn from the virgin birth of Jesus Christ and from his life as recorded in Scripture that he lived a sinless life, a perfect life. His active obedience God imputes to us, applies it to our lives. That is the doctrine of justification. God declares mankind Not Guilty because of what Jesus did. And for the person who believes Jesus lived a perfect life and then was punished for all the sins of all mankind, obedience to God's moral law is something that he or she wants to do out of love for God.

It is that grace of God that ***“teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.”*** How can we say "NO" to sin? We can't do it by ourselves. We need the power of the Holy Spirit working in us daily. The message is there for all mankind to hear. It's in the Scriptures, the Word of God. It is not mere human resolutions – such as many people make to start the new calendar year: “What are your new year's resolutions?” that will allow us ***“to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions.”*** It is the grace of God working in us that makes believers want to do what pleases God, and that means daily saying “NO” to those temptations of the devil, the world, and the flesh to live only for our selves, or only for this life, or to do only what will best serve MY goals in life. The Christian does not live a merely self-centered life. The Christian lives to serve God and our fellow humans. We learn that from Jesus Christ: From his example and from his Word – all of his words in the bible. Those who believe in Jesus Christ apply that truth to their daily lives: They daily beat down the sinful flesh; they daily fight the attacks of Satan and the evil world surrounding them. You know the problem isn't just evil temptations outside of us. It is our unkind and unloving, yes, our evil thoughts and words about others. It is our sinful flesh wanting us to give in to the worldly passions within us every day. “Everybody's doing it.” “Why shouldn't I do what I want to do?” “What's the harm in doing just this one little sin?” “Nobody will know.” “Why shouldn't I get what I can out of this life?”

Why? Because through faith in Jesus Christ and in appreciation for the grace of God shown to you in Jesus Christ you are taught from the Word of God to also ***“live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age”*** How hard that is! How difficult it is to be “different”. How embarrassing to tell someone that “My Savior Jesus Christ wouldn't want me to do this – to do whatever is wicked.” How unlike all those around us who tempt us to turn our backs on our ***“great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”***

But did you notice that our text doesn't point to the world as the cause and the blame for our own sins? It says ***“the grace of God that brings salvation ...teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.”*** That speaks of “self-control”.

We, God's children, those who believe in him, get to make daily decisions to live lives that are pleasing to God. Scripture talks about living self-controlled, decent, proper lives in this present evil age. SELF-control. You are the one who sins, although we want to blame others. Wanting and trying to blame others has been our human nature since the very first sin: Adam said at that time as recorded in Genesis 3:12, when asked by God what he had done, said: ***“The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”*** He wants to blame Eve, and even God, because God put the woman to be with him. And Eve is no better: ***“Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”*** Genesis 3:13. She tries to blame the devil, who had taken the form of a snake, a serpent. But we must admit that we are responsible for our own actions. And it is the grace of God that gives us strength and the will to live ***“self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.”***

The World is very evil. Jesus' second coming – to judge all who have ever lived – will be a wonderful, glorious day and a terrible day: a wonderful day for all who believe in him and a terrible day for everyone who didn't have time for Jesus, for everyone who ignored Jesus, for everyone who rejected Jesus, for everyone who lived only for himself, following only his or her own sinful passions.

We are waiting ***“for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”*** We and all who believe in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior from their sins are waiting – sometimes patiently, sometimes not so patiently, for Jesus Christ to appear on the last day. That will come at any moment – no one but God knows the hour and minute – and it will come without warning.

Thus we want to be prepared, we want to be ready, we want to be living holy, God-pleasing, ***“self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”*** That day will come as a thief in the night when we least expect it. It may be the sudden, unexpected moment of our death, or it may be the last day coming like a blinding flash of light. It will be a glorious day when Jesus appears because you believe in him! For all who believe it will not be the terrible, horrible day that unbelievers dread and try to avoid, just as they will go to any length to avoid death.

“The glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” is a moment we look forward to, relying on the Grace of God in Jesus Christ. Today is the day of salvation. Today, right now, is the day you are called upon to repent, to believe in Jesus Christ, and turn to him in his Word for direction for your life.

This is our hope and our confidence, and our comfort. These are the words the prophet Isaiah proclaimed: that ***“sin has been paid for”***, and that ***“the glory of the LORD will be revealed”***. Isaiah 40:2 and 5. The second time the Glory of the Lord is revealed will be when he comes to take all who believe in him to be with him in eternal joy and happiness.

Jesus Christ ***“gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”*** In his blood we are made pure and holy! May we live as his children! Amen.