

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Christmas Day, December 25, 2011

✠ ✠ ✠

(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 82, 79, 86, 89, 97.

Lessons: Isaiah 9:2-7, Titus 2:11-14, Luke 2: 1-4.

Sermon Text: 1 John 3:1-5.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

For all true Believers this Christmas Festival is a time of exceeding great joy. The reason for this genuine joy is expressed by the Christian poets who have written our hymns. One poet has written:

**"Hail the day so rich in cheer
For each earthborn creature!
God's own Son from heav'n draws near,
Takes our human nature."** (The Lutheran Hymnal, 78)

And another poet has written:

**"Rejoice, rejoice, this happy morn,
A Savior unto us is born."** (The Lutheran Hymnal, 79)

Another poet bids us express our joy in these words

**"Let us all with gladsome voice
Praise the God of heaven,
Who, to bid our hearts rejoice,
His own Son hath given."** (The Lutheran Hymnal, 97)

Our text for this day gives us ample reason to be joyous and happy at this time and throughout the year. Let us rejoice in this fact:

CHRIST OUR SAVIOR WAS MANIFESTED.

- 1. To take away our sins,**
- 2. That we might be the sons of God here and in eternity,**
- 3. That we might purify ourselves, even as He is pure.**

1.

The first truth the apostle John teaches in our text is that Christ was manifested to take away our sins. First the apostle makes it clear that we have sinned, and then shows us how Christ has taken away our sin. ***"Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness."***

We must, if we are truthful, confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against God daily by thoughts, words and deeds. We cannot hide our sin, for the all-knowing God sees us just as we are. He declares in the Bible: ***"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** Romans 3:23 The Bible also lists the many sins men are guilty of before God: ***"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like."*** Galatians 5:19-21

Our text says that ***“Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.”*** (King James Version) In sinning man places himself in direct opposition to God and His holy Law. God hates sin and in great anger punishes those who transgress His Holy Law. The fact that almost every person in the world perished at the time of the great flood certainly is evidence of God's hatred of sin. But God's hatred of sin is not only evidenced by punishment for sin here on earth. The punishment for sin which all sinners deserve and which all unbelievers will receive is eternal damnation in hell.

However, God does not delight in punishing the unbelievers. God's holiness and justice demands that sin be punished. But God's will is that all men come to repentance and be saved. And since it is impossible for the sinner to save himself by anything he does, God provided a way to salvation. So we read in our text ***“But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.”*** Jesus, the sinless Son of God was manifested, that is, He became a true man to take away our sins. He was manifested as a lowly servant of men, born in deep humiliation in the manger at Bethlehem. Nevertheless Jesus was manifested as the Savior of all men, even as the angel told the shepherds on the night that Jesus was born. The angel also told Joseph: ***“he will save his people from their sins.”*** Jesus did away with our sins by keeping perfectly God's holy Law which we have broken. When He died on the cross he suffered all the punishment for sins in our place. Therefore our punishment has been cancelled. There is no sin for which Jesus did not die. And no man has so many sins that Christ did not atone for them all. In God's sight we are now pure and righteous because our sins have been removed

That, dear friends, is our Christmas joy that Jesus was manifested to take away our sins. In the words of our text, St. John also tells us more that makes our joy complete. He tells us that Jesus was manifested that we might be the sons of God here and in eternity.

2.

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!”
“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.”
(King James Version)

St. John says ***“Behold!”*** in order that we may not thoughtlessly pass over what he has to say. He wants us to marvel at the great love the heavenly Father has bestowed upon us. In another passage St. John says: ***“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”*** 1 John 4:10

God's purpose in bestowing his love upon us is that we might be called the children of God. We Christians are not waiting for some future time to become the children of God. For us believers this is an accomplished fact. We are God's children now. However, we were not by nature the children of God. By nature, when we are born, we are children of Satan. For ***“That which is born of the flesh is flesh,”*** John 3:6 (King James Version) that is, it is sinful. We become children of God by being born again in a spiritual sense. When we have been converted or regenerated by faith in Christ, then we become God's children. Oh, how we should rejoice at this wonderful truth that God is our dear Father and we are his dear children through faith in Jesus.

The world, however, does not rejoice with us. St. John says in our text: ***“The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.”*** By the world is meant the world of fallen mankind, and those who refuse the love of God and continue on in their evil ways. The very thought of being children of God is something foreign to the minds of unbelievers. The world has closed its heart and mind to the love of God in Christ, and the result is that it does not know God's children.

The world is indeed proud of its knowledge, but it does not know the one thing needful. To be born again in conversion is foolishness to the world. The world has its own idea of the “fatherhood of God” and the “brotherhood of all men” which does not include redemption through the works of Christ. Such “Golden Rule Religion” is taught everywhere today. Therefore, let us not expect that we will be given recognition by the world for being the children of God. The names of God's greatest saints are not in the halls of fame of this world.

The sons of God also look beyond this life to eternity and the blessings it holds in store for them. Our text says: ***“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”*** The apostle John wants his beloved fellow-believers to look to the life hereafter. He is not saying that we will be more than God’s children in eternity, for there is nothing higher than that. But, here on earth it does not always appear so clearly that we are God’s children. Nobody on earth sees us in white robes of righteousness. The faults of our sinful flesh remain and sometimes hide the fact that we are children of God.

But in heaven our glorification will be made manifest. We know this and are sure of it. Even as Jesus was glorified by the Father and raised from the dead and was taken to heaven, so also on the last day we shall be raised from the grave and with glorified bodies enter into life everlasting. Jesus says ***“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”*** Matthew 5:8 And the Psalmist with a believing heart says: ***“As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness.”*** Psalms 17:15 (King James Version) Then our vision will not be darkened by sin, but we shall see God face to face, and ***“know even as also I am known.”*** 1 Corinthians 13:12 (King James Version)

The final reason St. John gives for Christ’s manifestation in the flesh is this:

3.

“Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.” We who are certain that we are the sons of God by faith in Christ, we who have the sure hope of everlasting life in heaven, we certainly will purify ourselves. We will surely want to lead God-pleasing lives. Our catechism says that our “new man should arise, as from the dead, to live in the presence of God in righteousness and purity now and forever.” Our new man in us, our regenerated self, can do this with the help of the Holy Spirit. He gives us the strength to serve God in an acceptable way through the means of grace, the Word of God and the Holy Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Our text is not speaking of a self-made holiness of life. We dare not try to invent a life which is supposed to be higher and better than the Ten Commandments teach. The purity of life of which our text speaks is not merely an outward appearance of holiness imposed upon us by the commandments of men. Christ alone has purified us by the holy, precious blood which He shed on the cross to cleanse us from all sin and guilt. God must break the power of sin in us by making us new creatures through faith in Jesus. Only by God’s power can the evil desires and lusts of our sinful flesh be driven out of our hearts and minds. We as Christians will therefore say with St. Paul: ***“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*** Galatians 2:20

May our Christmas joy be this, dear fellow redeemed, that we know and firmly believe that Christ was manifested to take away our sins, that we might be the sons of God, and purify ourselves even as He is pure. With such faith our joy will not be a passing joy, but will remain in our hearts throughout our life and continue and be complete in eternity. God grant us this for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

(Pastor M. H. Eibs, manuscript dated December 25, 1952 with this note: “Rewritten for Ministry By mail, December 28, 2003”. Edited by Robert Mehlretter for December 25, 2011.)