

What do you think the apostles would think about our celebration of Christmas? They would certainly marvel at all that we do for Christmas and all that the world does to celebrate Christmas. They would marvel at the celebration of Christmas because the early Christian church didn't celebrate Christmas until 336 A.D. Over the course of time the celebration of Christmas added the Christmas tree, Christmas carols, Christmas lights, Christmas decorations, and we can't forget Christmas gifts. Christmas Day also became a day off from work in 1870 when it was declared a federal holiday. So now that Christmas is a few days past, let's think about what Christmas is about. Christmas is about what God has done for us, as the apostle Paul wrote: **v 11. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people.**

A. Grace of God

1. Grace - general definition

- a. "The grace of God appeared." Paul is referring to the appearance of the Lord Jesus as a fact. Jesus came into our world to put into words and actions the grace of God. In English the word grace has many different meanings. It may refer to beauty in movement, or charm, elegance. It may also mean a pleasing or agreeable character. And it may also mean a time delay granted, as in a grace period. But the meaning we are interested in is this: grace is to show a person mercy or leniency or forgiveness.
- b. In other words, grace is to treat a person better than they deserve to be treated. And we surely see that at Christmas time with the giving of gifts. The giving of gifts doesn't depend on whether we deserve the gifts or not. If we deserved the gifts we receive at Christ they wouldn't be gifts but would be rewards for a job well done or payment for services rendered. That is not grace. Grace is giving undeserved gifts to those who don't deserve the gifts.

2. God's definition

- a. And that is how the word is used here, **v 11. For the grace of God has appeared.** The time had arrived for God to make visible for all to see his grace. The time had come for our God to treat people better than we deserve to be treated. First, let's be clear on how we deserve to be treated. We are all sinners and we deserved to be treated with justice which means we deserved to be punished for our sins by God. But our God is now showing us grace, that is, he treats us better than we deserve to be treated.
- b. The grace of God focusses the eyes of our souls on the birth of Jesus. Through the virgin birth our Lord Jesus has become fully human. He became fully human to take our place under the Law of God and keep the Law in our place. He became fully human to take our place under the punishment God hands out for not keeping his Law, death. Jesus has appeared in our world for all the world to see how the LORD God intends to treat us better than we deserve to be treated by treating his one and only Son exactly the way we deserve to be treated.

B. Brings Salvation

1. What salvation is

- a. And it is the grace of God, it is Jesus who has appeared **v 11b. bringing salvation to all people.** The word salvation is built on the verb to save. The Greek language has 4 different words for save to the English language's one word. In Greek there is save as in to cut expenses; there is save as in to come through, there is save as in put aside money for retirement, and there is save as in come to your rescue. This last Greek word that can be translated come to your rescue is the one word that the Bible uses. And when this word is used, it means you need the help of others or you will not get out of your predicament.
- b. The Bible uses that word because there is no way for us to get out of our sins. We are stuck with them and the only thing that can remove our sins is the LORD Jesus. But, before Jesus can do that, he has to enter our world.

- c. And it all begins when Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, became fully human and came into our world as an infant. He was born an infant in order to do a thorough job of taking our place under God's law, to do a thorough job of living a perfect life without sin. To do all that, Jesus had to start out life the same way we do. The grace of God appeared as an infant.
- d. In his years growing up to be an adult, he faced every temptation that we have as we grew up. In growing up to be an adult, he faced the same temptations as we do as adults. Through all of life's ups and downs, through trial, trouble and temptation, Jesus remained sinless in order to pass that holiness on to us.
- e. While Jesus birth was announced by an angel telling shepherds, **Luke 2:11**. **Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you, he is Christ, the LORD**. And then joined by a chorus of angels: **Luke 2:14**. **Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will to men**. An even greater announcement was made after Jesus died on the cross for the sins of all people. The announcement came on the third day after his death when Jesus rose from the dead. His resurrection announces to all the world that Jesus has saved mankind from sin, death and hell. And with that announcement the LORD our God comes to us with gifts. These gifts are wrapped up in the blood, sweat and tears, the life, death and resurrection of the LORD Jesus. These gifts our God offers to us though we don't deserve a single one. But that is really the point. God wants us treat us better than we deserve. God wants to give undeserving sinners the undeserved gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation to bring joy and happiness to the hearts and souls of people everywhere.

2. Salvation is for all

- a. **v 11**. **For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people**. Christmas is for all people everywhere just as the angel had announced, the glad tidings of great joy for all the people. The salvation that Jesus brings is for all people. The Christmas list that God has no exceptions, no exclusions, no forgotten ones. In comparison our lists are limited and sometimes we might forget to get a gift for someone. But not the LORD our God. His gift of salvation is for all people. And we have the opportunity to bring that gift to those around us.
- b. This is what Christmas is all about. But let's face it, Christmas is also about gifts, we give gifts to one another to reflect the gift of salvation God gives us in Christ his Son. And that gift of salvation is like one of those nesting dolls, you open it up and there's another and you open it up and there's another. The gift of salvation brings us the gifts of forgiveness of sins and certainty of eternal life. Not only is Christmas about gifts, it's also about food. While we may have a Christmas dinner prepared to celebrate Christ, the LORD Jesus has prepared a special supper for us. This supper, the Lord's Supper is where Jesus feeds us with his body and blood together with the bread and wine to strengthen our faith and assure us of the gifts we have from him, forgiveness, life and salvation. Christmas is also about family. Families travel long distances to be with one another, just like my wife and I have. But Christmas is also about this family gathered here around Word and Sacrament, for we are the family of God gathered together in this place and at this time to worship our God and Lord.

CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH: Today, even though Christmas is a few days past, let us continue to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus, born in Bethlehem to save all people everywhere from sin, death and hell. And let us celebrate Christmas with this in mind: **v 11**. **For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people**. Amen.