**Grace of God Appearing**

**Titus 2:11-14**

Christmas Eve

12.24.2021

Our text for this evening is the Epistle lesson read from Paul's letter to Titus.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, the Babe of Bethlehem, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

How long has the world look forward to the coming of this Child whose birth we celebrate? W need to go back to the beginning, to God’s confronting Satan after he had tempted them into sin. God speaks. to the serpent, *“Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”* (Gen. 3:14-15)

Did you hear it? Two things happen. First, God promises that there will be a virgin birth. It was plain as day, her offspring that will crush Satan’s head, not the offspring of Adam. No man would be involved.

Secondly, her offspring will crush Satan’s head. Her offspring would destroy his power and strength.

What are Satan’s power and strength? Sin and death. God had told these first two created in His image that if they ate of that one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would surely die. Well, God does lie. Ultimately they died, but then God does something else incredible. He points them to what is going to have to happen so when her offspring crushes Satan’s head. A few verses after stating their punishments: *The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.* (Gen. 3:21)

God, in His gracious mercy, instead took the life of an animal. He killed it, and made garments of skin as clothing for Adam and Eve. They had tried to cover their sin with fig leaves, God covered their sin with the lifeless husk of another living creature. A death took place – a sacrificial death – an animal gave its life so that they might live. God looked at the skin of the animal and His demand for their death was fulfilled in the life of that animal sacrificed for them.

Isn’t that exactly what the angel declared to the shepherds out keeping watch over their flocks by night when he appeared to them and terrified them? *“Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”*

This Child whose birth we gathered to celebrate today was born for a specific reason. He was born to fulfill the promise given in the garden. He came to crush the head of Satan. But in so doing, His heel would be bruised.

I know, you did not expect to go back to the beginning tonight, this is about Christmas. It is about the birth of our Savior.

Exactly correct, you said a mouthful.

It is about the birth of our Savior.

*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.* That is exactly what is wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Hidden in human flesh and diapers is the head-crusher!

Why the head-crusher? Because Satan is still trying to bring us to sin and death. Bringing us to sin is simple. My friends, God, speaking first to Titus through the Apostle Paul in our text tells us that we are to be living in a specific way as believers. We are to be nice, as the song says – or as our text says it – *we are to deny ungodliness.* God is to come first in our thoughts each and every day.

He also instructs us to deny worldly lusts. You are to be happy with whatever gifts you receive for Christmas, even if it is another pair of socks or a three-pack of Fruit-of-the-Loom. We are not to grumble if the NFL reschedules the Packer game to be played when we are to be at a Christmas program – it is obvious which should be the priority – and without any thoughts.

My friends, you do not do as this text advises. You and I do not deny ungodliness and worldly lusts as God demands and expects of us. You see, God looks for more than just who has been naughty or nice. God looks for perfection. He examines all mankind to see who is perfectly keeping His righteous demands.

You do not. I do not. It does not even take a serpent to entice us to touch the fruit, we are only to glad to fill a basket with it and eat all we can. You sin. I sin. You do not live waiting and watching for Christ with a sober mind which is focused 100% upon Him, awaiting His return. Too often, just like me, you are not waiting expectantly for the life to come, your hope set on the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

What do we want for this evening’s service? The grace of God appearing? Or, are we looking for that feeling of the tradition of Christmas? A certain ambience that happens because there are certain things, smell, lights, and other traditional sensory stimulants? And what does that tradition revolve around? Snow on the ground? Family all gathered? The smell of pine? Christmas gift bags with peanuts, an orange and/or apple, and some candy given to you as you leave? Church lights dimmed as we sing Silent Night?

Or, are we here for the grace of God appearing?

Satan really does not have try hard to get us to fall into sin. That’s easy! Some will be disappointed with at least one gift they receive – sinfully resentful of the gracious gift of another.

Think of the other attitudes we have toward our neighbors. Who do we despise and hate? Of whom are we jealous? After which person, or their belongings, do we lustfully desire?

Yeah, our sinful nature falls to those temptations easily.

But Satan’s biggest temptation is more crafty, he tries to lead us to a more deadly sin – a sin that could possibly lead to our joining him for eternity, an eternity apart from God, what is truly death – an eternal destruction.

You see, Satan wants us not to rejoice and be glad in the grace of God appearing. We wants us to focus on something else that *the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.*

So, Satan begins with his more potent deception. This attack comes as the two sides of the same coin. Satan tempts us to deny our sinfulness, that what we are doing is not evil, we do not need to repent, we have done nothing wrong, we do not need a Savior. If we fall into this – Satan wins.

The other side of the coin sounds like the complete other extreme but it ends up in the same place. He tempts us to believe we are beyond the ability of God to forgive us, that our sins are so terrible that there is no forgiveness. If we believe that we cannot be saved – Satan wins.

Here is the truth, *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.* “Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ, the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”

This is the One who is *our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.* He is the sacrifice foreshadowed in the garden as God clothed Adam and Eve with garments of skin. He is the grace of God appearing – who brings salvation.

It is why we gather in this place – whenever we gather in this place. We gather because here is where the grace of God is appearing. And He is appearing as He did that first Christmas so long ago. He comes appearing yet hidden.

On that day God’s grace appeared hidden in human flesh – hidden in swaddling clothes – hidden in a manger.

On Good Friday, God’s grace appeared hidden in human flesh – hidden in that flesh beaten, bloodied, nailed to a cross, and then hidden in a tomb.

On the third day after, God’s grace appeared to Mary and the others – He appeared to the disciples on the road to Emmaus – He appeared to His disciples in the upper room.

God’s grace appears here – Christ hidden in the Word proclaimed.

God’s grace appears here – Christ’s flesh hidden, sacramentally united to the bread we eat.

God’s grace appears here – Christ’s blood hidden, sacramentally united to the cup which we drink.

God’s grace appears here – Christ – our great God and Savior Jesus Christ – who gave Himself for us, that He might give Himself to us and make us holy, make us His own special people, make us His eternal kingdom.

What a glorious gift for Christmas! God’s grace has appeared to us again. Praise the Lord. In the name of Jesus. Amen.