

The Greatest Gift

2017-12-24 - Year B - Christmas Eve - The Rev. Christopher M. Klukas

Isaiah 9:1-7; Psalm 96; Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:1-20

- I have received many wonderful Christmas gifts over the years, but one of the biggest Christmas surprises I ever received was a check for \$1000!
- When I opened the envelope, I thought that it might be a mistake, that maybe the giver had accidentally added an extra zero when writing the check, but they assured me that it was no mistake. They had come into a surprising amount of money that year, and they wanted to share their gain with others.
- I can think of many other occasions when I have been significantly blessed through the generosity of others. Perhaps you can too.
- Some of the gifts that have meant the most to me are gifts that came at just the right time, when I really needed them. Especially when I couldn't figure out any way to meet that need on my own.
- We think a lot about gift giving at Christmas time, gifts that we might give to others, or possibly about gifts other might give to us! But why do we give gifts at Christmas time?
- We do so as a way to remember the greatest gift ever given. A gift that wasn't wrapped in paper but in swaddling clothes. A gift that was given to the whole world, though only a few knew about it at the time.
- Of course, I am talking about the gift of Jesus.

The Gift of a Baby?

- But, you may ask, how is a baby that was born more than 2,000 years ago a gift to all of humanity, even us today?
- Our reading from Titus this evening gives us a clue.
- Remember how I said that some of the gifts that have meant the most to me came at times when I needed them? This is how the gift of Jesus arrives in each of our lives.
- Titus 3:3 - our great need
- The next verse then declares that Jesus saved us, pulled us out of the muck of our lives, washed us clean by his Holy Spirit, and reconciled us to our heavenly Father from whom we had been estranged.
- Titus 3:4
- Paul then reminds us that this was not due to anything we ourselves have done.
- Titus 3:5.
- This is what we mean by the word "grace." Grace is a free gift, unearned and undeserved. And it was freely given because of God's great love for us.
- And everyone is in need of salvation, from the Adolf Hitlers of this world to the Mother Therasas. We are all sinners, and we all need a Savior. We all need grace.
- But that gift was not without a cost.

- The baby who was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger is God himself, the Son, the second person of the Trinity. And he left his heavenly throne to take on human flesh so that he could sacrifice himself for each one of us. For you and for me.

Heirs with Christ

- There is one more piece of this gift that you need to know about.
- In verse 7 Paul says that through this gift we have gained an inheritance.
- Titus 3:7.
- God is our heavenly Father and we were estranged from him because of our disobedience. But when Jesus washed us clean and reconciled us to him, our relationship was restored and we also gain an inheritance.
- Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we can all be adopted as sons and daughters of the most high God, and our inheritance is eternal life with our heavenly Father in the mansion he has prepared for us.

Have you opened your present?

- Gifts are meaningless until they are received.
- There are presents sitting under our tree at home right now. But until they are opened, they are just boxes wrapped in colorful paper.
- Have you received the gift of Christ into your heart?
- Have you accepted the free gift of his grace?
- He's waiting for you, and there is no time like the present to receive him into your life.