

Text: Titus 2:11-14

Theme: "A Christian's Christmas Carol"

Date: December 25, 2006 (Christmas Day)

In the name of Christ Jesus who is the same yesterday, today and forever, Dear Christian Friends.

"Bah! Humbug!" Not quite the words you would expect to hear coming from the pulpit: especially on Christmas Day. In the field of literature, however, such a quote brings to mind a well-known work of Charles Dickens entitled, *A Christmas Carol*. The tight-fistedness and miserly disposition of one Mr. Ebenezer Scrooge and his deceased business partner Jacob Marley call to mind the griming reality of a cold-hearted nature. In contrast, a heartwarming scene pictures the Cratchits and, of course, everyone's favorite, Tiny Tim gathered around what in terms of today would be a very modest Christmas dinner. And finally the visit which the Ghost of Jacob Marley pays to Mr. Scrooge sets the stage for the conscience pricking visits from the Ghost of Christmas PAST, the Ghost of Christmas PRESENT and from the Ghost of Christmas FUTURE.

The Christian's Christmas Carol, however, is much different than that of Charles Dickens. For the Christian, Christmas is a time of joy, comfort, peace and the promise of eternal life. None of which Dickens offers in his Christmas Carol; yet there is a similarity of sorts. In Dickens rendition his readers were forced to view Christmas Past, Christmas Present and Christmas future through the eyes of Ebenezer Scrooge. Today as we celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus we too have the privilege of viewing Christmas not through the eyes of a human being but through the words of the God who loved human beings enough to save them from sin and death. Today may God enrich our understanding and appreciation of his Christmas gift as we look at 1) Christmas Past – in a stable in Bethlehem, 2) Christmas Present – in the course of our lives, and 3) Christmas future – in the glory of eternity.

1. A Christmas of the PAST - In The Stable of Bethlehem

The most obvious place to view Christmas Past is to open our Bibles and read Luke Chapter 2; God's account of the very first Christmas. That's where we hear of Jesus' birth and the angels' announcement to the shepherds. But that's really not where Christmas began. No, if you are truly interested in Christmas Past you will need to open your Bibles to Genesis, the very first book of the Bible. You might think to yourself, there's no little town of Bethlehem, no shepherds, no Magi, no Mary, and no Joseph. In fact, there is no Baby Jesus. Or is there?

What is the essence of Christmas? Who you are and what you are would determine how you answer such a question. The worldly view of Christmas sees it as a brief time of cheer with material gifts and happy parties. For those of the world the essence of Christmas dies after the New Year is ushered in. For the Christian, however, the essence of Christmas is the timeless message of God's love for sinners in Christ, That very message of love is first found, not in Luke chapter 2, but in Genesis chapter 3. God promises to send Jesus as Savior with these words, *"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."* With these words God first promised to send a Savior to forgive the sins of all people. This is not only the essence of Christmas, this promise is Christmas. Everything else is just decoration.

Because sin entered the world, death came to all people. All people from the time of Adam and Eve need to hear and receive this Christmas message and life and forgiveness. Sin is devastating. It is disastrous. It is not imaginary. It is a reality that needs to be dealt with head on. A look at Christmas past enables us to see how God dealt with our sin head on.

Christmas past is more than just mere words and promises. Christmas past is fulfillment and action.

Christmas past takes us to the Bethlehem manger and the Calvary cross.

Christmas past allows us to see the soft-skin of little baby Jesus as well as the torn flesh of a dying Savior.

Christmas past lets us hear the worship of the shepherds as well as the jeers of the crowds who shouted "Crucify him, Crucify him!"

In the words of our text Paul too speaks of Christmas past: FOR THE GRACE OF GOD THAT BRINGS SALVATION HAS APPEARED ... WHO GAVE HIMSELF FOR US TO REDEEM US FROM ALL WICKEDNESS.

For you and me Christmas past also includes the Christmases we have gathered in this house of worship. When I speak of the Christmases of the past that have called us together as a family of believers, I'm not only referring to the Dec. 24s or 25s of years gone by. I'm not only referring to those times because Christmas doesn't happen only once a year. It happens everyday of our lives. The joy, comfort and peace of Christmas fills our hearts every time we walk through those doors to hear God's promises, every time we sing his praises and every time we receive his body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins.

The message of Christmas is the message of the forgiveness of sins.

Christmas past has offered the message of forgiveness at over 850 baptisms. Maybe one of them was yours.

Christmas past has been the basis of confirmation vows for over 640 of our young people, Maybe you were once one of those young people.

Christmas past has been the binding thread between a Christian bride and a Christian groom some 250 times at the Lord's altar.

Christmas past has offered the true body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins at countless Communion services.

Christmas past has been the basis of more prayers and sermons than any one can humanly recall.

Christmas past is all about God's wonderful works for the salvation of all people.

But like Dickens' Christmas Carol, no sooner have the thoughts of Christmas past been sorted through, than we find ourselves in Christmas Present. What are our present surroundings? Moses writes, *"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time"* (Genesis 6:5). Our world is filled with wickedness, rebellion and sin. How does the Christian survive in such a climate? Matthew answers that question with the words, *"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness."*

2. A Christmas of the PRESENT - In The Course of Our Lives

Christmas present is about seeking God's council and guidance offered through his Holy Word. That is why you and I are here today. We are not here for reminiscence of Christmas past. We are here because of Christmas present. Christmas present as Paul writes to Titus: **TEACHES US TO SAY "NO" TO UNGODLINESS AND WORLDLY PASSIONS, AND TO LIVE SELF-CONTROLLED, UPRIGHT AND GODLY LIVES IN THIS PRESENT AGE.** The message of Christmas present is to give us strength to fight against the temptations of this sinful world.

Christmas present may also bring to mind thoughts of uncertainty concerning our personal lives; our health, our job-security, our relationships with our spouse, our family and our children. Christmas present may lead us to think about the ministry of our church and our congregation; how will we continue to reach out to the unchurched and do mission work, how will we as a part the synod continue to support our worker training programs so that we have pastors and teacher to serve in the ministry, and how will we as a congregation respond with our prayers, our time and energy, and our gifts?

Christmas present addresses and fully answers everyone of those very real concerns. The message of Christmas present is as St. Paul writes to the Philippians, *"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus"* (4:19). The greatest need we have each and every day is the forgiveness of our sins. God says, *"Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven."* When we know and believe that our sins are all forgiven, we also know and believe that God is working everything in our present life for our spiritual and eternal good. The promises of God in Christmas past assure us of God's blessings in Christmas present.

3. A Christmas of the FUTURE - In The Glory of Eternity

But we don't live our lives just for the here and the now. We live with eyes of faith that look forward to a Christmas of the future in the glory of eternity. In the words of our text Paul writes: **WE WAIT FOR THE BLESSED HOPE-- THE GLORIOUS APPEARING OF OUR GREAT GOD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST.**

Christmas future is characterized by trust:

- trust in God to forgive us for all of our sins;
- trust in God to declare us not guilty;
- trust in God to raise our dead bodies on the last day and to glorify them;
- trust in God to take us to heaven.

Christmas future is also characterized by trust in God to lead us, guide us and bless us in the new year.

Christmas future trusts that if God would allow us to get sick or suffer an accident in the New Year that he would also use it to bring his blessings into our lives.

Christmas future trusts that if we would loss our job in the New Year, God's promise to provide for all our earthly needs will not change.

Christmas future trusts that if in the New Year our relationship with our spouse or our children suffer because of sin, we know and believe that God's Word of forgiveness has the power and ability to mend any and all relationships strained by sin.

Christmas future is nothing less that complete confidence in God to meet all our needs.

The Christian's Christmas Carol is indeed no "Bah! Humbug!" Instead, let us rejoice and be glad. In Dickens' Christmas Carol, the hard-hearted nature of Scrooge was changed. In the Christian's Christmas Carol, our hard-hearted nature of sin is also changed. It is changed to joy by the gospel. May God grant that our hearts are always filled with joy as we remember Christmas past, as we practice Christmas present and as we long for Christmas future. Amen.

