



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
www.mzluth.org

December 24, 2008
Candlelight Worship
Titus 2:11-14
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 9:2-7
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 96
Second Lesson: Titus 2:11-14
Gospel: Luke 2:1-20

Look at What Has Appeared

Saving grace for all
Grace that changes believers

A few weeks back, when I suppose your favorite team still had a shot at the playoffs, I drove home. When I got out of the car, I noticed up in the sky, it wasn't Superman, it was a blimp. I don't see the blimp every day flying overhead in Morrison, so when I went in the house, the first thing I did was say, "Come out and take a look at this!" It isn't something you see every day, right? I don't remember which one it was, but it was a blimp. I knew that much. It was something out of the ordinary, something unusual. So we all came and looked and it pattered on and went out of sight and we all went back inside.

For that night that Jesus was born, God had to send angels to tell people that something out of the ordinary had happened. Did you ever stop to think about how blessed you and I are, as we come together on a cold, blustery evening, to know the One that we are coming to worship is something special? He isn't just another baby. He may have been born in an unusual place, but he's God who has become flesh. When you stop and think about that truth – God has become flesh – we know we should look at what has appeared. Here is something absolutely extraordinary, absolutely special.

So because God has blessed us with his Holy Spirit, as we sit in the dark in church this evening, we can marvel at the love God has for us as we consider what has appeared. In this Christ child centers saving grace that is for all people. And in this child that the shepherds came and saw, you find something that changes us. It turns the direction of our life around. It turns the focus of our lives around. We'd never know that if God hadn't revealed it to us. How wonderful it is that we know what has appeared.

When Paul wrote to Titus, in Chapter 2 he was telling him, "When I leave you there, you teach what needs to be taught to the people." Then he spends the rest of the chapter talking about things like this – the grace of God that has appeared to all people. Teach them about grace. This is something that has to be taught. It isn't something that we can know in and of ourselves. We wouldn't think what it tells us here – the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. Literally it's a better translation to say the grace of God that brings salvation to all men has appeared. That's more clearly what it says, just like it says in other places in Scripture, the atoning sacrifice for our sins, not

only for our sins, but the sins of the whole world. We'd want to come up with the idea that somehow it was something we would have to do to finish the things that Jesus had started. We wouldn't understand that saving grace is here for everyone.

Jesus' life and death in our place, he gave himself to redeem us from all wickedness, not just some strains of wickedness. This isn't like the flu shot which is hit or miss, whichever strain is going around. And you and I can sin in a lot of different ways. You and I have a lot of different wicked nesses that we get caught up in, but here is God's saving grace that has appeared to us. Jesus came and became flesh to live perfectly and then die with all of those wicked nesses piled upon him. He took them all away. He has redeemed us, or bought us back, from every last one of them.

Thanks to God's Spirit working in us through the Word and the Sacraments, we know this. We treasure this. We sit back and can really do nothing more than shake our heads at the love that God had for us while we were still sinners, that he would do all of this for us, not for himself, but for us. This is what undeserved love, or grace is all about. And this is what Paul reminded Titus "that's what you have to stress for the people because they'll never figure it out on their own. They'll never see it. It won't appear to them unless you hit them with the Law and the Gospel so the Spirit can open their eyes so they can see."

Then he says, "When they see this, here's where things change." It changes us. It changes what we want to do and it changes what we focus on. It teaches us to say "no" to all ungodliness and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives. He tells us that we are his very own. Then we are eager to do what is good. It changes our focus from self to God's love for us and then reflecting that love for others. We become eager to live in a way that pleases God.

The other night I was on the computer and I was checking on something, and there was a thread of discussion that caught my eye. Someone asking, "How do you deal with grief at the holiday season?" So I wanted to read what they said. I must have gone through 30-40 of them. Some were good, common sense advice. Some were rotten, I thought. But I didn't see a single one that pointed us to this comfort and this confidence that we have in Christ that has changed us so that we aren't the same and we don't approach things the same. We are eager to live to serve our God to focus on others because he loved us first and has taken away our sins. We are eager to do the things he wants us to do, not because we have to but because now we want to. We won't always do them perfectly. We still are sinners. But we can approach this holiday season different than so many people do.

We can approach it knowing that God became flesh because he loved us. God poured that love into our hearts through his Spirit. And that changes not only what we want to do but what we focus on. We don't just focus on the trappings of the holiday. They can be good and they can be enjoyable. I'm not saying that they are wrong. But we see them as a way to see Jesus and to see his love and to remind ourselves of the glorious truth that Paul points us to. We live upright and godly lives in this present age, while we

wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. It changes what we focus on.

We focus on our Savior. We focus on not only the here and now and the things that we can see, not only economic downturns, not only disappointments, not only heartaches, but the fact that we have someone who is walking beside us who loved us enough to become, not just knowing us, but in our skin literally so that he knows all the things that we go through. He had been tempted in every way that we are, yet he was without sin. And he is the One who has told us in Scripture that he will keep us strong to the end. While we continue to look at his Word and his Gospel and his love, he does the work. He keeps us strong.

Paul's words here to Titus really remind us that when you and I come together with our eyes of faith and we crowd into that stable where Mary and Joseph are, and as we peer over the shoulders of the shepherds, kneeling, standing, whatever they were doing, and we see that manger that the child is wrapped in cloths and laying in, you and I see a different shadow cast by that manger than what they did. You and I see the shadow of a cross, of an empty tomb, of an ascended Savior. We see a Savior who is now ruling over all things for the good of his church. We see not only that he came; we are blessed much more beyond the shepherds because now we can gather together and see what he did, what God has promised us. And we can look forward past the manger, past the star to the glory of Jesus as he returns to take us to our heavenly home where we will be reunited with all the saints.

What a glorious truth this is. Look at what has appeared in a simple little manger.