

Titus 3:4-7 - Christmas Day [2015]

The Miracle of Christmas

⁴ But then God our Saviour showed us his kindness and love. ⁵ He saved us, not because of the good things we did, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins and gave us a new life through the Holy Spirit. ⁶ He generously poured out the Spirit upon us because of what Jesus Christ our Saviour did. ⁷ He declared us not guilty because of his great kindness. And now we know that we will inherit eternal life. [NLT]

Do you believe in miracles? Miracle - according to a dictionary definition - is: "an unusual or wonderful event that is believed to be caused by the power of God". A miracle is an event for which there is no reasonable explanation. One such event is the festival we are celebrating today - there is no reasonable explanation for Christmas.

We wish each other 'happy Christmas' because the best news of the world is wrapped up in

The Miracle of Christmas

The miracle of Christmas is not just the fact that God is born a helpless infant - that he became exactly like one of us -, but the fact that he chose to do so, in spite of everything! In spite of the state of the world and its people.

God would have had every reason to complain how bad things were: that people were going from bad to worse, that there just was no helping them, as they kept on doing what was wrong - and harming themselves and the world around them. He could have come to the conclusion that the 'experiment mankind' had failed. Would it not be better to make fresh start?!

The Miracle of Christmas is that God did make a fresh start - but that he did it with us! We sang last evening: **World in sin lay broken, when Christ's birth first spoken** - and we could add: in spite of everything this happened.

In the verse preceding our reading Paul describes how those who had become Christians had previously been: "**Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled by others and became slaves to many wicked desires and evil pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy. We hated others, and they hated us.**

The logical conclusion should therefore be: 'So God appeared in his righteous anger to judge and punish all who had who had chosen a life without him and against him!' That, after all, would be his right - and nothing less than we had deserved!

Instead we hear: **But then God our Saviour showed us his kindness and love.** *The Miracle of Christmas* is that God - in spite of everything we had done - still wants to come to us. And so this 'kindness and love' of God took human form: In Jesus Christ the kindness and love of God become visible for all to see. He is the living proof of God's love and kindness. Through Jesus God reaches out to all people - to those who had been waiting for his coming, but also to those who had given no thought to God and his coming.

This *Miracle of Christmas* happened **not because of the good things we did, but because of his mercy.** Christmas did not come about because people had prepared for it so well. [We know of the Pharisees that they had tried to prepare the way for the Messiah - yet most of them seem to have missed out on His coming!]

Christmas did not happen, because we deserved it. Christmas is the story of the '**kindness and love of God**'. It is the story which underlines that God did not come into this world to destroy his enemies: His purpose is to **save** and not to punish. So He invites us - he invites you again today - by his kindness and love to have your life changed!

Christmas is the story that: Christ "**comes to bring us blessing, from all guilt releasing**"

God washed away our sins and gave us a new life through the Holy Spirit. ⁶ He generously poured out the Spirit upon us because of what Jesus Christ our Saviour did. ⁷ He declared us not guilty because of his great kindness. And now we know that we will inherit eternal life.

The candle we have standing at the Baptismal font is there to remind us where our life from God started. It points to the fact that by and in our Baptism, Christmas came to us also. Year after year we are reminded that our life has its origin in God, and that he gives our life meaning, because by Baptism the '**great kindness** of God' became a reality in your and my life. Now our lives are to be determined by everything we have by this **kindness and love** of God!

Now what happened in the stable of Bethlehem is not just any story - it is our story. It is the story of our life - of how we were given life! *The Miracle of Christmas* is that we are no longer held captive by the life we had led or by the world we live in; we are not to hide behind the excuse any longer: 'I just can't help it - it's the way I am. God has set us free, because we have been reborn and renewed in the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is God's Christmas gift to you - yet, like any other gift, it needs to be unpacked and looked at - we need to read the manual to understand what it means to us. Unfortunately there are always those who believe that they can do without the manual - they only look for it, once things have gone wrong. Yet, God's manual for our lives is not just a matter of choice - we really need this manual to really live. That is why we are here today - that is why we have services every Sunday; that is why we are invited to begin our days with God's Word to direct us.

So we read in this passage that God **washed away our sins and gave us a new life through the Holy Spirit**. That is more than just directions for us in a manual - it points to who we now are. This new life given to us is truly a miracle! What we once were, no longer applies to us! We are not subject anymore **to many wicked desires and evil pleasures** which had determined our previous life!

The wonderful *miracle of Christmas* - the good news of great joy - is that God is with us - in spite of everything. He will remain with us.

That is why we may wish one another 'Happy Christmas' - because we don't get what we deserved, but instead have been showered by God's kindness and love!