

**SERMON PREACHED AT WALKERVILLE ON CHRISTMAS EVE & CHRISTMAS DAY**  
**2017**

One of the positive things we say about a person is, "What you see is what you get." There are no put-on airs and graces, no false impressions. What you see is what you get. However, that's not the case at Christmas. We all know the facts of the Christmas story very well – Mary and Joseph, the inn that was booked out on Trivago, the stable, the star, the angels, the baby, the shepherds, "Glory to God in the highest." Every year the story is repeated all around the world – and thank goodness that it is. It's quite wonderful.

We all know so well what **we see** in the story. But what's going on? **What do we get?** Lying beneath the surface is a whole world of theological truth. I know that those 2 words, "theological truth" can have the effect of making our eyes glaze over and our minds go into neutral gear. However, this particular theological truth is something that you will participate in tonight/today in many ways. Let's look under the surface.

When St Paul wrote his letter to his friend Titus, he said this, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ." (Titus chapter 2 verse 11-13). This was read as our New Testament reading. Now it doesn't sound like a very Christmassy reading. But it looks **under** the surface, and gives us a very good look at what God was doing at the birth of God's Son, Jesus. It tells us what we get.

What Mary and Joseph and the shepherds, and eventually the Wise Men **saw**, was a baby – a new human being. But what a human being! Jesus has been written about and sung about in many different metaphors – last Sunday here at church we spoke about Jesus under the metaphor of a lamb. St Paul in those verses I just read writes about Jesus under the metaphor of "the grace of God." The people present in Bethlehem **saw** a baby – but **what they got** was *the grace of God*.

Interesting expression – "the grace of God." In Christian terms, it means "the favour that God gives us, and we don't deserve it in any way." Humans hadn't done anything at all to *deserve* God coming in human form as Jesus. God chose to do it, because it was God's choice. We could not possibly devise a humbler, less pretentious way for God to come in human form than through the process of human birth ... through the young, probably frightened Mary. And yet God chose to do it this way. We could not think of a humbler, less pretentious set of surroundings for God to make his entry into the human world than in an animals' food box in a stable out the back of a booked-out inn. And yet God chose to do it this way. We **did** not deserve it, we **do** not deserve it, but every Christmas, we are reminded again about the grace of God, coming in lowly circumstances into our world. "The grace of God appeared."

Every day of our lives we see evidences again and again of the grace of God – underserved favour. And tonight/today, if you have eyes to see ***beyond*** what you see, you also can see the grace of God in your life ... in your family's life. You will get more than what you see.

There are people for whom Christmas is a sad event – the anniversary of the death of a family member ... the remembrance of another negative event in their life. Despite the sadness, many such people are able to enter into part of the joy and the celebration of the day. And the fact that they can rise, even though they have sad circumstances, is an evidence of the grace of God in their lives. They live out this theology of Christmas.

Today if you are in the company of people over lunch or dinner at your home or another home – and reminiscences are told, and your heart is warmed by the memories of days gone by ... those people lift you into a good place in your heart – the grace of God in your life. You are living out this theology of Christmas.

Perhaps today you will look around you and see your family – those older than you, those younger. And as you remember that in many parts of the world there are people who will have no family because of war or terrorism or violence or accident or by choice, for you today, your family and those relationships are evidence of the grace of God in your life. You are living out this theology of Christmas.

If you are sitting on a sofa, and someone puts into your arms the youngest and newest member of your family, or if a junior member of the family crawls into your lap, what they are really saying is that because they trust you and because you love that child, they entrust that child to your embrace and cuddles for a while. That trust ... that love ... those hugs ... the grace of God in your life. You are living out this theology of Christmas.

Today is traditionally a day of sharing – gifts ... weak jokes from bon bons ... laughter ... fun ... back-yard cricket. Sharing means being able to enter into the joy of other people's lives. It means having their joy enter into our lives. Sharing with family ... sharing with friends ... it's a part of the "goodwill to all" that was the angels' song. It's part of the grace of God. And in that sharing, you are living out this theology of Christmas.

Today is a day when many people are rostered on for work – Police ... bus and train drivers ... airline pilots and cabin crew ... ambulance officers ... electricity and gas and water workers ... CFS ... SES ... hospital staff ... others ... whose work we may use today to let us be in touch with family and friends. Let us be thankful for those who work for us while we have time off. And yet, for them, in the company and fellowship of their fellow workers and friends, as passengers and clients express thankfulness for these people who work today, in that company and gratitude these people can experience the grace of God in their lives. **They** can experience this theology of Christmas.

But we must think the Rohingya people seeking safety in Bangladesh; we must think about the famine in parts of Africa; we must think about North Korea, and military personnel on duty around the world today, for whom "the grace of God" must be close to impossible to see, to feel, to appreciate. Let us not be so cock-eyed about the joys of Christmas that we forget the world's trouble spots. Let's not be so cock-eyed about the world's trouble spots that we forget about the joy of Christmas. Look at your table and family and friends and cards and gifts today, and remind yourself that, in all these lovely things, "the grace of God is appearing" to you and to your family. You are living out theology today. Happy Christmas.