

January 7, 2007
Baptism of Our Lord

"The Kindness of our God Saves Us"

TITUS 3:4-7

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Have you ever been deeply touched when someone shows you an unusual amount of kindness and love? I think of a night a couple months ago. I was helping my son start his truck where it was parked along a busy street in Santa Barbara. A man walked by, a total stranger, stopped, and asked if there was anything he could do to help us. For some reason that simple act of kindness left a deep impression that I still value today. All of us have stories to share about similar acts of unexpected kindness. What a joy and privilege it is when we have the opportunity to show kindness to others!

This third chapter of Titus from which we just read begins with words that encourage Titus to remind Christians to "be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate and show true humility toward all people." The strength and power to do this comes from the kindness and love that our God has shown to us.

Let's turn our attention now to this kindness and love of our God as it is presented to us in these words just read to you. It is our power source to show more kindness to people, especially those who are right around us in our homes, at our jobs and with our friends. It has been said that these words from Titus 3 provide one of the best summaries of the gospel in the entire Bible. Let's now take a closer look at **"The Kindness of our God Saves Us"**

The kindness of God declares us righteous

Our God has been so kind and good to us because he has found a way to declare us righteous and make us acceptable to him when there was no way we could do this. "But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy." The word used here for love is not the word most often used in the New Testament, the familiar word, *agape* that is used in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world..." The word used here is *philanthrope* from which we get the word "philanthropy." Philanthropy is the kind of love that sees a person in need and wants to fill that need.

Did you hear about the man in New York who was standing with his children waiting for the subway train when a young man with a history of seizures, fell down into the path of the oncoming train. He was not able to get out of the way because of the seizure. This total stranger responded by jumping down onto the tracks, putting his body on top of the man

who was having the seizure, as the train passed over the top of them, The train came so close it brushed grease on the back of his sweatshirt. The young man owes his life to this total stranger.

We are even more impressed at the kindness our God has shown us. Notice it says that this kindness appeared to us. It popped up in human history with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. It popped up in human history at Jesus' baptism in the waters of the Jordan River. Joyfully the Father proclaimed from heaven, "You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased." The word epiphany means appearing, this sudden bright appearance of light and hope in the kindness of God who gives us the gift of his Son.

God's kindness and goodness to us cannot be gained by the righteous and good things we do in our lives. Let's be honest, brutally honest with each other this morning. We may have shining moments when we show kindness and love to random people we meet, even total strangers. Where it really gets dicey is showing consistent kindness and love to the people who are closest to us. Listen to how Paul describes our situation in the verse just previous to these words about God's kindness to us. "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another." Have you ever been so worried about yourself, and caught up with yourself that you totally neglected opportunities to show kindness right under nose?

We are told by the Lord to love your neighbor as yourself. Do you realize how hard that is, especially when we are so caught up with ourselves? That is impossible because you and I continually raise the bar higher and higher by our self-love. Imagine trying to love your husband or your wife, or your kids or your brothers and sisters, or total strangers as much as you love yourself. That is an impossible task. If God rewards us with his kindness on the basis of our kindness, we are lost, hopelessly lost. Romans 3 was not exaggerating when it says, "There is no one righteous, not even one."

Thank God that he saved us, not because of righteous things we tried to do, but because of his mercy. Oh, how we love that word mercy. It has the thought of being concerned about something or someone that is hurting or suffering. Did you ever have a pet that was suffering, and finally you reached the point where you showed the poor creature mercy by taking it to the vet and having it put to sleep? Even though you loved the animal and it brought you much joy in life, you did the hard thing. You showed mercy. Nothing in the realm of human experience compares to the mercy God showed you.

The Lord tells us in his word that he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. A perfect and holy God cannot accept people the way they are in sin or he violates his own standards of justice. What God did was give us the gift of his Son, mark him at his baptism as the Christ who would sacrifice his life to save us. Jesus was willing and eager to show us mercy. He did not hesitate to become the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Romans 5 says of this kindness and love and mercy: "You see just at the right time, while we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly die, but God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Such is the kindness and goodness of our God that has appeared to us. Such is the mercy that saves us.

The kindness of God works saving faith

What good is all this love from God for me, if I think it is just a bunch of nonsense or foolishness? Or what if I find myself believing with a vast sea of humanity that the material blessings the Lord provides me are more valuable than the gift of his Son? Here is where the goodness and kindness of God steps in at another level. He saves me by leading me to believe in something that I would normally not accept or value. "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior." The Holy Spirit was poured out on Jesus at his baptism. Our gospel for today said, "And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him bodily in the form of a dove." The Holy Spirit was poured out on you generously when you were born again and renewed. How clearly this new birth is described in Ephesians 2, "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in trespasses and sin." Then it goes on to say that this faith, this amazing new life, was all a free gift of God's kindness and love: "It is by grace that you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift of God.

Your God is so good and so kind to us, even though we don't deserve it. We see this kindness and goodness this morning in this word, "washing" and immediately we think of the washing that we have experienced in baptism and what it means to us. Jesus tells us in John 3, "Except a man be born again of water and the spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Rebirth is a blessing of the Holy Spirit. It is a blessing that comes to people through God's word and it is blessing that also comes to us in our baptism.

Jesus told his disciples and Christians of every age to make disciples by baptizing people and teaching them to observe everything he has commanded us. Baptism is much more than some ritual cleansing carried over to us from the Jewish people living at Jesus' time. It is much more than an ordinance that needs to be fulfilled, or a way to show that you are true believer. Baptism gives the blessing of putting on Christ, burying us with Christ, saving us, washing us, providing forgiveness of sin, giving us the Holy Spirit, and providing us with a clean conscience before God. We don't say, "I have been baptized." We say, "I am baptized." It is an ongoing blessing in our lives. It is a generous outpouring of the Holy Spirit that connects us to Christ.

You see dear Christian how you are twice blessed. You were blessed when Jesus appeared on this earth to save you. You were blessed when the Holy Spirit planted saving faith in your life so that you could believe and accept these blessings. And in a way you are thrice blessed, because your God fills your life with the sure hope of an eternal inheritance that is waiting for you.

The kindness of God gives the hope of eternal life

What kindness we see in these words, "So that having being justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life." Have you ever inherited some money from someone? An heir usually has a special relationship with the person who leaves a certain amount of money, such as a grandmother, or father or mother, or brother or sister. When my grandfather's brother Carl died in WW1 he received his brother's life insurance

policy that allowed him to buy the farm from his brothers and sisters. When people died in war it was said, "they bought the farm."

These beautiful words "having been justified by grace," remind us that our God has declared us perfect and holy in his sight. By his death and resurrection from the dead, Jesus bought our inheritance for us, qualified us to be saints, declared us to be righteous in his sight, made us heirs of eternal life. Romans 8 says, "Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." 1 Peter says our inheritance bought for us by the blood of Christ, "In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade, kept in heaven for you." All the kindness and love that you want to show people this coming week flows from the kindness and love of God that saved you by giving you Jesus, that saved you by giving you faith, and saved you by filling your life with hope.