



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Christmas Eve Candlelight
December 24, 2020

Glory to God in the Highest

Titus 2:11–14

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth peace, goodwill toward men. Amen. Why, as Christians, are we so giddy tonight? What is it that gets even the un-Christian world caught up in the excitement and joy? It's the birth of a little child in the town of Bethlehem of Judah some 2000 years ago.

Of course, this was no ordinary child. Yes, it was a human child, just like our children, but more than that. Oh, wonder of wonders! It's a child in whom God Himself resides. He was and is the God-man. Born in a cattle stall, wrapped in swaddling, laid in a manger on hay and straw, and yet the angels appeared to tell shepherds in the fields that this child is God, the Lord Himself.

Tonight, we don't need to dig deep into this mystery. Oh, it is indeed a great mystery, beyond our comprehension. But tonight, let's approach it in simple faith, which we can do. For from this deep mystery flows a bright and clear light, just like the candles we'll light evening, a light that even children can understand, a light which our text spells out so clearly. The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. Just a few simple words, yet words which incite joy in us this evening.

But what aspects of God appeared to us in Bethlehem? You know, God has many qualities – attributes – that He could have shown to us. God could have shown forth His justice, for God is a just and righteous God. But, would that have been a joyful revelation to the world? No, indeed! It would not have been a time of joy had God revealed His justice, precisely because we're all sinners. We know that God hates sin, and has promised to punish sinners. When God appeared to His Old Testament people in His justice, they ran away. If God had appeared Christmas night in His justice, we wouldn't have had shepherds running to see the child; they'd have been running in the opposite direction, and us with them. But we can be happy. We can *go* to the manger with joy, for Christmas did not bring a revelation of God's justice.

Well, what about God's love? We know that God *is* love, right? Maybe that's what appeared on Christmas. Sounds like a much better choice, doesn't it. In fact, this love is



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what most of the world seems to be celebrating tonight. But again, we're sinful people. What good would it be if it were only God's *love* that appeared to us? We know that parents punish their children even more diligently the more they love them. And if it were only God's love coming, maybe He would be coming to punish us disobedient children.

Don't you find it interesting that the world celebrates God's love at Christmas and yet so often finds this time of year lonely, hectic, and sad? But we can be truly happy on Christmas. Our text tells us that it was not God's justice that appeared. It wasn't even only His love that appeared. But it was the *grace* of God that appeared.

And not only that; the grace of God *that brings salvation* has appeared! "How can that be," you ask? Come to Bethlehem, and see the wonder of God's grace with your own eyes. What does it mean that here, in such poor, miserably human conditions, we find God – God, who became a human being for us? What does it mean that the Lord of Lords has become a servant of servants? God became man to rescue us, to save us from our own predicament of sin, death, and hell. Here we see only the beginning, but the whole story is that this baby grew up, faced unmentionable suffering, hung on a cross, forsaken by God, until at last He would cry out: "It is finished!"

What this Baby came to do, He accomplished not too far from His birthplace. So let us all go in spirit to Bethlehem tonight, and though we may be unworthy sinners, yet let us joyfully fall down before that manger and worship the child who is God Himself. Here the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared. Oh, but one more thing. Just a few words tacked on at the end. But oh, what important words they are! What if our text ended here? What if the message was only: "the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation?" The question would then be, to whom?

Has the grace of God appeared only to the good people? Has it appeared only to those who repent? Has it appeared only to those who *believe*? No, because if that were the case, many millions of people would find absolutely no comfort in this message.

But, praise be to God, the message goes on. We hear, to our amazement: "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation *for all people*. Not one person in the whole wide world – from Adam to the last to be born – can be excluded from this grace of God. No one is excluded. Yes, there are those who exclude themselves, but even to them, the grace is still there, waiting.

And that grace of God is still appearing. We don't need to go physically to Bethlehem to experience it. No, it's here, tonight, in the sacrament. The flesh and blood of our Savior who once lay in the manger is here with us in bread and wine, according to His promise, and with it, the forgiveness of sins. What a time of grace this is! Tonight, my dear friends, I urge you not to get wrapped up in earthly gifts or joys; don't let your sins and unworthiness depress you. Rather, rejoice in God's saving grace for you and for all.

And if you say: "I don't *feel* that grace," then remember that God's grace did not appear *in* your heart. No, it appeared outside your heart – in *God's* heart. It appeared at



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Bethlehem; it appeared on Calvary. God's grace has appeared to everyone, and that includes *you*.

Let us pray: O Grace of God that brings salvation, You come to us this Christmas Eve. You take hold of our lives and make us Your own. Draw us into Your heart, hold us steady as our loving Father, let nothing take us out of Your hand until we finally see You face to face and praise You in Your home of grace forever. In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen