

## Christmas Day 2018

### Titus 2:11-14

11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, 12 training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. 14 He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

#### Message

The grace of God has appeared  
bringing salvation to all

### **Introduction**

Have you ever been made to wait for a meeting wondering what sort of reception or treatment you might receive? Will there be warmth and understanding or grumpy put down and dismissal? Within a moment it becomes clear. Will there be grace – that kindness and unmerited favour - or harsh judgment?

Christmas is good news as we heard from Paul's letter to Titus today: For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all.

Now let me ask when that grace appeared?

You may be aware that one of the big debates in church history was around this.

There was an Eastern answer to that question and a Western answer.

The Eastern answer focused on the day Jesus, the Christ of God was revealed to the Nations. So that is marked on Epiphany, three kings or 6 January. 25 December is not a big deal in the East.

In fact my Greek daughter-in-law Chrysa has her Greek name day on 25 December. Rather than celebrate her chronological birth date the Greek way is to celebrate her name and all names are assigned their own date in the calendar. Her name date is 25 December.

Meanwhile in the West, the Romans decided to mark the day of God's grace appearing in the Julian Calendar on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December at about mid-winter when the warmth and light of grace could be well appreciated. It was just the date they settled for and does not actually claim to be Jesus' birthday. It's a bit like Queen's Birthday in June (in some places at least) or Dutch Koningsdag in April.

The point I want to celebrate this morning is that grace, the good will and undeserved favour of God, appeared bringing salvation with it when Jesus Christ appeared.

He appeared at his birth,

He appeared when the Magi from the East found him

He appeared to John the Baptist in the Jordan River.

He appeared transfigured to his friends

He appeared as God's suffering servant on the cross

He appeared resurrected from the grave.

In his first and every appearance, God's grace became visible and that brings salvation with it.

St John was an eye witness and in his Gospel opening when he says: *(as I read last night)*

<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. Having seen that grace and truth John also know the salvation that come with it

Now let me illustrate with reference to the average bird brain.

### Illustration.

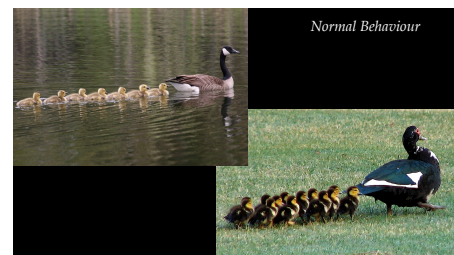
Us human beings are animals, animals created in the image of God, but still animals. We share many features with animals especially mammals but not just mammals.

In the 1930s an Austrian Scientist named Konrad Lorenz discovered something about geese and ducks that applies to many other animals including us humans in various ways.

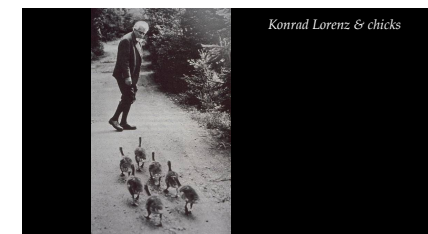
He took some goose eggs away from the batch Mother Goose was lying on and hatched them separately. When the separated batch of eggs hatched he made sure he was there and he stayed there. Meanwhile the eggs under Mother Goose also hatched and chicks appeared.

The two batches of baby geese or goslings behaved quite differently.

Those hatched under their mother followed their mother around just as goslings usually do.



Normal Behaviour



Konrad Lorenz & chicks

However, the goslings that hatched with the scientist Konrad Lorenz followed him around and not Mother Goose. They even followed him when he went in the water or paddled a canoe.

The interpretation of this was the theory of imprinting. It seems that for many birds, and some other animals at a certain point of their development that is different for different species, that they attach to what they see and interact with.

This simple and repeated experiment taught a great deal about attachment, or how various animals bond with their young which is how we humans first learn to form attachments.



God is not Mother Goose and not an experimenting scientist either.

God is the creator parent who has lost his children. They are like sheep gone astray or goslings with no one to follow.

He made humanity to be his children and bear his image in creation but that bond got broken by sin and rebellion.

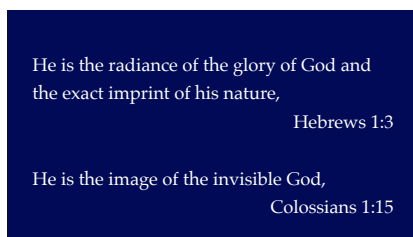
God's broken heart and persistent love led him to sending Jesus as his presence among people as they were in the world of humanity.



He appeared in person to bring a vision and experience of grace in a way that all people could recognize, a grace that all those lacking the bond to their creator and feeling the broken attachment could receive to be saved from the consequences of brokenness and alienation from God.

Unless we humans are connected to our creator,  
 Unless we have a healthy bond with God,  
 Unless we are well attached to our heavenly Father,  
 We are lost and vulnerable to all the bad consequences of that. Sin and death will have us and great is the tragedy of that.

In Jesus, God's grace and truth appeared to us and still do.



The writer to the Hebrews says: (1:3)

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature,

To The Colossians St Paul wrote (1:15)

He is the image of the invisible God,

The Christian is he or she who receives God in his appearance in Jesus and become imprinted on him who God has sent among us.

Like the bird chicks emerged from their egg, the Christian is one who looks at Jesus in such a way that he or she bonds, follows and imitates him.

This is the way of salvation.

This is the basis for training to 'renounce impiety and worldly passions, and live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly'.

Simply imprint on Jesus.

It is not always easy. In the weeks leading up to Christmas I felt like I was being stalked. I was the customer everyone wanted. On television and especially by email or on-line news apps, I felt stalked. In order to get my euros everyone wanted my attention. Without a mute button or skip-this-advert option I would go mad.

What sales were after was my attention because once they had that there is a chance that my interest would lead me to click a purchase online and sign over some euros. Advertisers know that our life and energy in euros will follow our attention.

The way of God in Jesus Christ who makes God's grace visible as a baby in Bethlehem born of Mary, the way of Jesus for his followers, all flows from looking at him and being shaped and trained by what we see. Discipleship begins with eyes and ears turning to him. It is very good news that this became possible in the coming of Jesus.

This is the deep Christmas present 365 days a year, east or west, north or south.

If you are with me this will take you to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They bring the eye-witness accounts and the reports received from those who saw and beheld his glory – the glory of God's Grace and Truth.

The baby in the manger doesn't say anything –yet– but he will.

What we call 'Christmas' speaks more of the immense love and grace of God that took the unavoidable risk of pain in bringing the grace of heaven to a broken world. What it takes to find the lost and embrace the still hostile prodigal.

For this the grace of God has appeared in Jesus!