

Christ the Savior is Born
A sermon by David Roquemore
First Presbyterian Church
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Isaiah 63: 7-9

Listen again to the words of Isaiah,

I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us, and the great favor to the house of Israel that he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

We recount the gracious deeds of the Lord during Christmastide. We tell again the good news of Jesus Christ, of the salvation God brings in Christ, of the peace, hope, love, and joy that come from Christ our God.

For folks around us, it is time to put away the tree, take down the decorations, and turn attention to football. Christmas is over. For us, Christmas has just begun – as we begin a lifetime of recounting God’s gracious, glorious deeds.

Perhaps this week you will hear people ask, “what did you get?” For most of us older than 12, the answers are fairly routine, though now and then someone gets a remarkable gift. It isn’t that we aren’t creative, it is just that it is very hard to equate love and tangible gifts; it is very hard to translate our feelings into material goods. Does he really love her more if he went to Jared’s? (echoing a frequent television commercial).

What did you get? Salvation from sin. More important than that: you got salvation from death. Death entered the world because of sin, and all of us get that. We now have freedom from the power of death. To be sure, we all die, but death cannot separate us from God. In Jesus Christ we find that death is the entrance into a life more fully in God’s presence. And so we rejoice!

What did we get? We got love and joy in this life. Even in the midst of pain, affliction, suffering, depression, sadness, and trouble, we have joy. In the midst of all the boredom and meaningless activity in this world, we have joy. In the midst of our isolation from one another, estrangement from those we care about, and loneliness, we have love. We find a community created where love rules the day. We love one another.

And all of this comes as a great big Christmas gift from God, in Jesus Christ.

The ancients taught that salvation is a kind of exchange, a switching places. The 2nd century theologian Irenaeus said it, “he became as we are so that we might be as he is.” Thomas Torrance, the Scottish theologian, put it this way, “He [Jesus] came to take our place, in all our human, earthly life and activity, in order that we

may have his place as God's beloved children, in all our human and earthly life and activity, sharing with Jesus in the communion of God's own life and love as Father, Son and Spirit."

Jesus shares our life, and gives us his life: in baptism we are grafted into that life, into him. And so with joy we celebrate our baptisms! Even when we are separated by the pandemic and the danger of getting this virus, when we have to stay home, can't visit each other, can't have parties – amidst all of this, we find that still, Jesus is with us, and creates community among us!

St. Ephraim the Syrian (AD 306-373) was a writer of long and beautiful hymns. One of his prayers for the birth of Jesus says so much about this gift we have received. Listen!

Nativity Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian

The feast day of your birth resembles You, Lord
 Because it brings joy to all humanity.
 Old people and infants alike enjoy your day.
 Your day is celebrated
 from generation to generation.
 Kings and emperors may pass away,
 And the festivals to commemorate them soon lapse.
 But your festival
 will be remembered until the end of time.
 Your day is a means and a pledge of peace.
 At Your birth heaven and earth were reconciled,
 Since you came from heaven to earth on that day
 You forgave our sins and wiped away our guilt.
 You gave us so many gifts on the day of your birth:
 A treasure chest of spiritual medicines for the sick;
 Spiritual light for the blind;
 The cup of salvation for the thirsty;
 The bread of life for the hungry.
 In the winter when trees are bare,
 You give us the most succulent spiritual fruit.
 In the frost when the earth is barren,
 You bring new hope to our souls.
 In December when seeds are hidden in the soil,
 The staff of life springs forth from the virgin womb.

Christ the Savior is born! Thanks be to God! Amen!