

Christmas Past Brings Christmas Present

✦ **Pure grace (v.11)**

✦ **Pure life (v.12)**

✦ **Pure hope (vv.13-14)**

In the name of Jesus, our newborn Brother, dear fellow members of God's family:

Out of the all the Christmases of my life this one is strange by far. We thought it would be a quiet Christmas. Almost all our grown children were home last year. We saw them all at Thanksgiving for Sarah and AJ's wedding. But then Cindy's Dad needed surgery. And this became the first Christmas that I've ever been home alone. I have no booby traps for hapless criminals. I have no plans for *Home Alone Two* and *Three*. But this Christmas did give me a chance to think about all the lonely people out there who sometimes feel alone even with their family. Some have no family at all. Some hearts are aching for loved ones lost. There's always enough sadness to go around. But when the nights are long and the days are damp and cold, then comes Christmas. It never waits for life to get easy. It just comes. That's how Jesus came the first Christmas. And that's why **Christmas Past Brings Christmas Present** in ...

✦ **Pure grace (v.11)**

Some of the coldest places in the world are the hearts of those on the inside looking out. If you heard a knock on your door and saw a ragged man outside, would you open it? If he pointed to a young woman with him and said she was about to give birth, would you let them in? If we had been there in Bethlehem, would we have done differently than all the townsfolk who booked the rooms in the inn? Would you give up your warm and cozy bed for a stranger, especially if you knew she was carrying a child that wasn't even his? Have we not in our heart of hearts turned away from people we knew who needed help? Have we perhaps in our pride refused the help of those who really cared for us, leaving behind hard feelings that make this Christmas so alone?

Think what God could have done in anger that first Christmas. And since we've been upset and impatient with each other for far less, could any of us really blame Him? God could have called down from heaven to the tired family on the streets of Bethlehem: "Mary! Joseph! They have no room for you. The inn is full and their schedules are too busy to take you in. They don't even care that you're carrying my Son. My angel chariot is coming to take you to heaven today. Let them be stuck with some imaginary man and his sleigh. You said, 'Okay,' to my plan to have God born as man. Mary, you gave up your womb to have God holy Son. Joseph, you heard the angel and kept Mary your wife. By faith you are righteous in my sight. You're coming home. There will be no Christmas for a world of sinners."

But so it was not! While the world busied itself with a census by a Roman Emperor who claimed to be god, the true God gave us His undeserved love to be born in a manger. "How silently, how silently The wondrous gift is giv'n! So God imparts To human hearts The blessings of his heav'n. No ear may hear his coming, But in this world of sin Where meek souls will Receive him still, The dear Christ enters in." (CW 65:3) Like it or not, listening or not, the world got a Savior from sin that night. "**For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all people.**" Can you see God's Son born in the manger for you? Can you see His smile, beaming **Pure grace**? **Christmas Past Bring Christmas Present** to you. Our sins are the reason God gave a Savior this season. He wants for you...

✦ **Pure life (v.12)**

Did you see the commercial about the spoiled kids getting more gifts than ever this year? One even concluded he deserved it. "I must have been really nice," he said. "Naughty or nice" are their only

Christmas criteria. Most believe it makes all the difference between lots of presents or just a lump of coal. But what does God look for? He says, “Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.” (Leviticus 19:2) What does He see in our hearts? Fear, love and trust in God above all things? Love for your neighbor as yourself? Constant prayer, or days without? Eager listening to sermons, or little attention at all? You know how it feels when someone does because they have to. In matters of the heart, you want their heart. How could almighty God win selfish hearts like ours to be as loving as His?

Only God full of grace could have made a way like this. In every culture it’s hard to turn away from a baby. Children want to play with them. Women want to hold them. Even the coldest, hardest criminal would see no reason to run away. God came His way to win our hearts for Himself. He wrapped up all His goodness, all His kindness, all His love in that tiny bundle of joy in Bethlehem. **“For unto us a Child is born. Unto us a Son is given.”** (Isaiah 9:6) Seeing such a gift from God who is God Himself, strips away our pride and pretense. God’s grace in the manger **“teaches us to say, ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.”**

The grossly immoral people on the island of Crete where Titus received this letter from Paul, were not so different from many in our culture today. They live for themselves and love only themselves. That’s where the temptation is so strong for us to treat them as shamefully as they treat us. Martin Luther put it this way, “It requires no great wisdom to live only among the godly and do good, but the keenest judgment is necessary to live with the wicked and not do evil.”¹ But that’s what God’s gift of **Christmas Past Brings** us for **Christmas Present**. God’s grace empowers us to forgive the unforgiveable and to love the unlovable. That’s how God loves and forgives us in Christ right now. And when **“this present age”** has passed away, thanks be to God that for Jesus’ sake, we have...

✠ **Pure hope (vv.13-14)**

In a way every Christmas reminds us we are waiting **“for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”** And there’s a reason why we wait in **Pure hope**. God had us dead to rights. We had no reason to hope for anything but eternal punishment for our unkind words and deeds. Even our thoughts were all stacked up in God’s evidence locker. A mountain of sin stood against us. But then came God’s Christ to take all our grief and shame on Himself. God’s own Son stepped in to pay the penalty for our perversion. God gave His Son to us that first Christmas. But God’s Son **“gave himself in our place to redeem us from all wickedness....”**

Why would He do that? Why would He care? He knew what lay ahead from the manger and the cattle stall all the way downhill in the hatred of the religious leaders, the rejection of the crowds, the betrayal and denial by His own dear disciples. He knew that in the depths of His holy, sinless life of love and kindness there would be a hill called Golgotha where His priceless blood would stain the sand for your sins and mine. Yet Jesus **gave himself for us** because He had a goal in mind more precious to Him than life itself. He wanted us to spend eternity with Him in heaven. And while we live here below, He wanted **“to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”**

When you see how Jesus redeemed you from sin, death and hell, what can you do, what can any of us do, but say, “I’m sorry,” and over and over again, day after day, keep saying, “Thank-you! Thank-you! Thank-you!” What can we do to please Him? How can we please Him more than to live in **Pure hope** that soon we will be going home and not alone. In fact, because He is always with us, we know even now we are never really alone. His name is Emmanuel, *God with us*. And when we are finally home in heaven, we will see His smile of welcome and feel His arms of love around us. **Pure hope** eagerly lives **Pure life** because we’ve been blessed with **Pure grace**. Thanks to the Christ of Christmas, we’re not alone at all. “Let us all with gladsome voice Praise the God of heaven, Who, to bid our hearts rejoice, His own Son has given.” (CW 64:1) Amen.

¹ *Sermons of Martin Luther*. John N. Lenker, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, re-printed 1988, Vol. VIII, p. 339.