

God's Gifts to You This Advent

✦ **Grace** (vv.3-6)

✦ **Peace** (vv.7-9)

In the Name of Jesus the Christ of God, our coming Savior, dear preparing Christians:

What's the hardest assignment God will ever give you? Little kids might think just "be good," as your parents keep telling you. But what if you're grown up, still trying to "be good" while faithfully going to church? There is something more difficult for children and adults. The hardest assignment for any Christian: **"Wait on the LORD."** Someone hurts you: **"Don't say, 'I will avenge this evil!' Wait on the LORD, and He will rescue you."** (Proverbs 20:22 HCSB) When the world seems to be falling apart, when evil seems to triumph all around, **"Wait for the LORD. Be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD."** (Psalm 27:14 EHV) Waiting is hard enough. Waiting patiently takes a miracle. Don't go to Men's Clothing, or Women's Clothing. It's not in Electronics and Games. Miracles? That's God's department. Leave your wallet at home, just bring your heart. **God's Gifts to You This Advent** start with...

✦ **Grace** (vv.3-6)

What if that were your name. Now you're a wife and soon to be a mom. You've been taking good care of your body for that little baby. Everything's ready at home. You've planned for the family to be a baptism a few weeks after your due date. Then your doctor sees the ultrasound and moves the due date back. But you feel and look like what everyone keeps saying, "Any day now!" So you wait...past the due date...waiting... waiting...a "Lady in Waiting." You have to wait. But how can you wait with quiet patience and trust in God? That, my dear sister in Christ, will take a miracle of God's **Grace**.

So you receive a letter from God, penned by His Apostle Paul, with this greeting: **"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."** (v.3 NIV84) How cool is that? **"Peace"** will come, but how do you get **"grace"** now? Listen: **"I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus."** You too were baptized into the saving Name of Jesus. God pours in more of **"his grace"** to help you every time you think of that sweet Name of God's Son, hearing, reading, meditating on Word and Sacrament. It's a gift! **Grace** comes softly and quietly while you wait.

How about this? You never thought it would happen to you. Books have been written, TED Talks trying to help women escape from abusive relationships. You finally see it, but don't know how to get out. So you cry. Cry to the LORD. He hears you today and still says, **"Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you."** Keep crying to the Lord; His help is on the way. I can't tell you how. I don't know when. But God sent His own dear Son that first Christmas after His people waited for centuries. Your waiting may feel like centuries too. He's coming to help, to save and to bless. "But I got myself into this!" you cry. My dear sister in Christ, God knows. That's **Grace**. God's heart is moved to help us when we're sure we don't deserve it. And when your loved ones are angry at him, but you're still hurting from the loss of what you felt was his love, you can remind them too: **"Don't say, 'I will avenge this evil!' Wait on the LORD, and He will rescue you."** (Proverbs 20:22 HCSB) **Grace** gives words and actions.

"For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge – because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you." (v.5f NIV84) While we **"wait on the LORD,"** listening to sermons and devotions, meditating on a steady diet of His Holy Communion Supper, God pours His Word into our hearts, strengthens us, then makes us overflow with what our loved ones need around us. My prayer: "When words are called for, let them be the words you call forth from a

heart that you've made clean and new." Blessing deserved? No way! Gift given? By God each day. Such **Grace** poured into your heart and soul from God who alone can go there? Think about that. You can't buy this in the stores – any time of year. Never stocked on shelves or in a warehouse. But the windows of heaven are open with showers of blessing ready to sprinkle gently on your heart. That's God's...

✠ **Peace (vv.7-9)**

"All good, Pastor. Easy for you to say. But what about me when I've lost my job? How can I have **Peace** when it seems as if God's **Grace** got up and walked out on me?"

Haven't you heard, my brother? "The night is often darkest just before the dawn." Don't you know? We just sang in today's Psalm: "***The earth is the Lord's and everything in it.***" (Psalm 24:1 NIV84) God who promises us our daily bread has given you time to catch up on a few things. Trust Him so you can make the most of this time. Maybe someone you know just lost his job and needs you to come and help. It may take a drive across several states to rescue him from a dangerous situation. How will you pay for that? It happened to one of our members. She lost her job just when someone dear to her lost her job and literally needed to be rescued. After all that extra expense she was invited to a Christmas party. Long and short, she won three prizes, including Grand Prize: gift cards and a flower for her mom = \$600. Go ahead. Trust God or laugh. But He will always answer, "***Let it be to you as you believe.***" If you prefer to argue with God as if He some stingy Scrooge, He'll let you go your own way. If you quietly, "***Wait on the LORD,***" trusting His **Grace** to help you at His time in His way – all is well. God is good. He grants His **Peace** softly and gently like the moon that rises with a silver lining across God's land.

But you're a childless couple, long hoping to hold a little one in your arms. You feel the longing for little voices. Your heart aches as you want to be happy for others while you, "***Wait on the LORD.***" Can you wait patiently? Hear God's Word through Paul's pen again: "***Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for the Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.***" Dare I say that the original Greek word for "***lack***" sounds like **Hysterectomy**? This body is passing away in pain. There's so much heartache here. But keep your eyes on Jesus. Then even in the worst case scenario, He has already given you every "***spiritual gift***" you need more eagerly to "***wait for the Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.***" No doctor can supply this. It's among **God's Gifts to You This Advent**. Such **Peace** in God's love!

Maybe all this sounds good for everyone else. Let's say you've been sitting in a class all week listening to God's Word and agreeing, taking part in discussions, but you know you've wandered far from God. You're secretly terrified He may not take you back. This happened years ago in China. I'd been teaching all day. A man asked a question. My interpreter shared, I answered. Each attempt got the class more and more disturbed. Finally, another sister spoke up, addressed the man and the class for a few minutes in Chinese. I didn't know what she said, but the **Peace** that came over the man's face was astounding. When she finished, the whole class clapped. They were overjoyed.

Afterwards, I asked her what happened. "Pastor Cordes, this man was asking if God would take him back after he fell away. Your interpreter was not translating his question correctly. So I told him Jesus' story about the Prodigal Son and his forgiving father." Remember that, dear friends? The son who ran away, wasted his whole inheritance on wild, sinful living. He comes home because he's starving, only wanting to be a servant in his father's house. But his father has been waiting, longing for his son to come home. He sees him far away, runs up the road to him, throws his arms around him and welcomes him home. He throws a party for the son who was dead, but now is alive; who was lost, but now is found. (Luke 15:11-24) That is our Father in heaven, waiting for you to return so He can throw His loving arms around you and hold you close to His heart. All He ever wanted was your heart to give you His **Peace**.

"He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful." All God's idea: He started it, He'll finish it when you're finally safe at home. ***Faithful*** is our God! Amen.

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