

## “CHOSEN TO BE BLESSED; BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING!”

Sunday, January 2, 2011

2<sup>nd</sup> Sun. a. Christmas, A

Zion Lutheran Church, Beecher, IL

Sermon Text – Ephesians 3:3-14

Old Testament Lesson – 1 Kings 3:4-15

Epistle Lesson – Ephesians 3:3-14

Gospel Lesson – Luke 2:40-52

I

n the name of Jesus. [Amen.] Our sermon is based on the Epistle reading read a few minutes ago.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

I have a riddle for you: What do Aristotle, Bill Clinton, Gerald Ford, Newt Gingrich, Faith Hill, Edgar Allen Poe, and Nancy Reagan all have in common?

Wait. I'll tell you what. Let's hold off on that answer for now. We'll get back to that in a few minutes.

Dear Christians, In today's Epistle, St. Paul reminds us again... with crystal clarity... what's the purpose of God sending His Son into the world as a Baby at Christmas. He tells us that behind it all... **“before the foundation of the world...”** His desire was to call us to be members of His kingdom.

Think about that... Before creation *began*... before the events recorded in Genesis Chapter 1, verse one happened... God had *us* on His mind. And *how* did we figure into His thinking...? Paul *also* answers that: **“...that we should be holy and blameless before Him.”**

Let that sink in... From *eternity*... **“Ere the worlds began to be”** as you'll sing later, God, Himself, **“the Alpha and Omega... the Source and Ending”** of all things, had *us* in mind, to call us to be His own precious sons and daughters.

In other words, He created everything for His glory, and with the express purpose to share it with us!

In what is perhaps “the granddaddy of all mysteries...” (Paul calls it: **“the mystery of His will...”**) in *that* mystery, God chose us; He **“predestined us for adoption”** to be counted as His beloved children for time and eternity! And it was out of His love... **“before the foundation of the world...”** that caused God to do that!

So... what's so “mysterious” about all this? There are a couple of things:

First... It's an incredible mystery that the Lord of the Universe in all of His power and might and glory would even *want*... to share His kingdom with anyone or anything.

Consider your own self... How often are you ready and willing to share *just a part* of your money or possessions... *or even your time*... with those who are in need? Be honest! Most... *if not all of the time*... what we share with others is given begrudgingly... and if not *that*... it's given with an eye on the future... when payback will be asked *and expected*!

But it's *not* that way with God... Oh, no! Out of His love... out of His pure desire to share the glories of His kingdom... He created the world with the purpose to share *everything that He has* with mankind!

The second part of this mystery is even greater... and it builds upon the first part. God created all things and gave the preeminent spot in all creation to mankind... and after all *that*... well... you know what happened... *He was rejected*. But He *continued* to love us!

**“What rejection? When did I ever snub God?”** you ask. Well, God has given us 10 Commandments... but let's just consider the First. In that commandment He calls His people to **“...have no other gods before Me.”**

But, how often on a given Sunday is the NFL your god?

How often is your Sealy Posturepedic mattress allowed to be your god of the day?

And how often does God's call for you to **“love your neighbor as yourself...”** always hold sway in your life?

Yeah... I'm right. You... me... we all... have rejected and snubbed our gracious Father in heaven. But... again... St. Paul tells us that in spite of *that*... our heavenly Father *continues* to love us!

That's why the Christmas Gospel is so well loved. It shows that our Father who from eternity determined to give us His kingdom... wouldn't... *and didn't* ... withdraw His love from us! Rather, He sent His one and only Son, in the form of a Baby to us... to live among us... to identify with us and our sin. He became our Redeemer... taking our sins and their punishment into His flesh, and then suffering on the cross what it is that we deserve – to be damned to hell... never again to be in the presence of our loving Father!

You see... **“in Him...” “in Christ...”** the mystery of God's love is made known to us. In fact, take your bulletin home and do a word search later today. No less than **9 times** in today's Epistle lesson does Paul use one of those two expressions to point out that through Christ... **we have obtained an inheritance...** of which the riches are incalculable and the joy unending.

But... you gotta note something here. By no means... miss this. God loves you and had predestined you to be adopted as one of His own. But, after He calls someone to faith, those whom He calls to faith are to *remain* in the faith. Paul tells us: **In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit...”**

Here Paul clearly says that only those who *continue* to believe in Christ as Savior will inherit the riches of God... that Christ earned on the cross. For those who reject... those who no longer believe... for them... because of their stubborn refusal to embrace the faith... for them... they're *still* orphans... *unadopted* by God and without a room in His heavenly mansion.

But for *us*... God has indeed lavished His riches upon us. Moved by His Spirit, we're His own... given the gift of faith in Christ in that miraculous holy washing known as “Baptism.” And through *that*... we're undeservedly blessed... adopted by Him through faith in His Son and our Brother, Jesus Christ!

And so, strictly out of His love, God has adopted us. And because of our status as His beloved children we, in turn, are used by God to be a blessing to others! Until we realize the ultimate

goal of our faith... to dwell with Him in our real home... we're willing instruments of His **"to the praise of His glory."**

Yeah... *now*... as God's children, we honestly and truly seek to make God's will to be that of our own. Lead by His Spirit, we lead our lives as a reflection of our noble status as one whom God personally chose to be a member of His kingdom. We give of our selves – our time, talent, energy, and material assets. We seek to reflect God's love to others... hoping thereby... that they would see our selfless actions and want to know more about what motivates our kindness and generosity in this "dog eat dog" world of ours.

We now begin this New Year of 2011 and as a congregation we begin it... I believe... as a different congregation than what we were just a few months ago. A renewed spirit of purpose has enveloped us.

That was reflected in our coming together to welcome our community to the Christmas House Walk a few weeks ago.

It's also reflected in a brotherly spirit to seek to make the work program at Zion to be on a financial footing that's the best that it's been in many years. As an example of that, right now we're in the process of taking delivery of 33... did you hear that... 33 new computers for our school classrooms and church and school offices... *and every one of them* is already paid for!

These are only two examples of how we who call Zion "home" reflect our status as God's people... not to *our* glory... oh, no... all that we do is a reflection of what God has done through us to *His*... *His* glory!

Through His Means of Grace in Word and Sacrament may God continue to remind us that we're His own, that He loves us, and that He calls us to walk with Him and reflect His glory to a the world lost in sin and death and darkness!

And now, back to the riddle that I posed earlier.

What do Aristotle, Bill Clinton, Gerald Ford, Newt Gingrich, Faith Hill, Edgar Allen Poe, and Nancy Reagan all have in common? Most likely, you've already guessed the answer. Each of those famous people was adopted!

Each one, due to nothing that *they* did, was chosen to be given the status of being the child of someone else. They were cared for. They were nurtured. Their physical needs were provided, *and... they were loved!*

And so it is with *us*! Due to nothing that we did, we were chosen by Christ, Himself, to be given His name of "Christian" in our Baptism. From eternity, and strictly out of His love, He chose to adopt us and make us to be members of His family with a rich inheritance in heaven!

Dear Christians, the world scoffs at your title of "Christian." It sees it as nothing... and perhaps even a detriment... to what it foolishly considers to be "the good life" here on earth. But through faith in God's promises we know that our status endures throughout eternity!

In a few minutes you'll leave here to re-enter the fallen world... but as you leave... go forth in joy and peace. Go forth as a noble child of the almighty, all-powerful, eternal Lord of the Universe. Go forward knowing that your real home is in your Father's heavenly house. Thanks be to God! [Amen.]