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Human Claims to Freedom and God's Judgment Richard Klann	241
Martin Luther on Preaching Patrick Ferry	265
Bernard of Clairvaux as Luther's Source Franz Posset	281
Homiletical Studies	305



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Homiletical Studies

Epistle Series B

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

December 2, 1990

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

During Advent we anticipate our Lord's "coming," especially His coming again on the last day. The introit for Advent 1 sounds the theme for the entire Advent season: "See, your king comes to you!" Our Lord Himself reminds us in today's gospel that we do not know when our king will return; we must be watching constantly. But we Christians are not afraid of our Lord's return. St. Paul reminds believers in the text (the epistle) that God has made us ready for the last day by the gift of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, whose incarnation and birth we shall celebrate soon in Christmastide. Luther's great Advent hymn, "Savior of the Nations, Come" (the hymn of the day), also suggests that it is our Lord's first advent which prepares us well for His second one.

If any congregation of people seemed unprepared to meet their king in His "apocalypse" (verse 7), it was the congregation in Corinth. Schism, strife, false doctrine, unionism, superstition, and abuse of God's gifts were rampant in this congregation. But the Apostle Paul reminds these Corinthian sinners (and us sinners today) in the introduction to his First Epistle to Corinth that no one prepares himself to meet his king; God prepares us by grace alone through His Son Jesus Christ. We note Paul's repetition of "Jesus Christ" in these few verses, emphasizing the fact that we are who we are through Jesus Christ alone. We note also all the passive verbs in this section (verse 4, *dotheisei*; verse 5, *eploutisthete*; verse 6, *ebebaiothe*; verse 9, *eklethete*) underscoring the passive receptivity by which the Corinthians enjoy God's gifts; the only active verbs in this section are used of Paul (verse 4, *eucharisto*) and of God (verse 8, *bebaiousei*). The Corinthian Christians (and Christians today) have nothing to do with their salvation. Only two verbal forms refer to the Corinthians, neither of them finite verbs—the first in verse 7, *hustereisthai*, an infinitive, and the second in the same verse, *apekdechomenous*, a participle. The Corinthians *do* nothing for their salvation; they are "lacking nothing" (because of what God has done for them and given them) and they are "waiting" (*apekdechomenous*, present participle).

Introduction: "See, your king comes to you!" This is the theme of this Advent season which we begin today. Jesus makes it clear in the gospel this morning that He is coming back and urges everyone to

watch and be ready. Many will not be ready when Jesus returns on the last day for judgement. Are you ready? St. Paul reminds us this morning that we believers are most certainly ready:

READY TO MEET OUR KING

- I. We are ready, not because of our own careful preparations or efforts, but because and only because of what our gracious God has already done for us.
 - A. Left to ourselves we only make a mess of our lives and bring down God's anger on ourselves.
 1. The members of the Corinthian congregation were like us in many ways. They bickered among themselves and were jealous of one another; they abused God's gifts; some lived in ways that shocked even the pagans living around them. Paul sadly wrote, "Some. . . have informed me that there are quarrels among you. . . Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly."
 2. Paul then warned them, "Some of you have become arrogant. . . Shall I come to you with a whip?" (4:18-21).

Transition: We also often live in a way which deserves only a "whipping" from a holy God. We must all agree with Isaiah when he cries out to the Lord, "We continue to sin against Thy ways. How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean. . . and like the wind our sins sweep us away" (see the Old Testament lesson). How can we be ready to meet our king?

- B. God has made us ready to meet our king through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.
 1. We note how many times St. Paul repeats our Lord's precious name in these few verses; he wants us not to forget that all we are and have as Christians comes through Jesus alone.
 2. Only Jesus can give us the gifts of God since only Jesus shares God's nature intimately (in verse 3 the one preposition "from" [*apo*] governs both "Father" and "Lord Jesus Christ").
 3. This Jesus, God's own eternal Son, came into our world and took unto Himself our own flesh; He became "incarnate" and was born of a virgin on that first Christmas so He could be our Savior as Luther has us sing: "Savior of the nations, come, show Thyself the virgin's son. . . Father's equal, Thou wilt win vict'ries for us over sin."

4. Our Lord Jesus, true man and true God, has earned for us all the gifts of God's grace and brought us peace with God forever (verse 3).
- C. God has given us all the benefits of our Lord's victory.
1. He "called" us also "into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ" (verse 9) through holy baptism, uniting us with our crucified and risen Lord Jesus.
 2. Through faith, and through faith alone, we enjoy all God's gifts and treasures.
 - a. We note all the passive verbs Paul uses in these verses. We receive; He gives.
 - b. And He gives generously: "You have been enriched in every way" (verse 5), especially in "speech and knowledge" (verse 5).

Transition: Because of our Lord's victory and the gifts of His grace and forgiveness He has given us in the gospel, we can anticipate the return of our king without fear, since we know He comes, not to condemn us, but to give us eternal life, as we sang in today's introit: "See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation."

- II. But not only are we ready to meet our king because of what our gracious God has already done for us in Christ; we are ready because of what He promises to continue doing for us.
- A. He continues to provide everything we need.
1. Apart from our Lord's first advent we lack everything before God (cf. Romans 3:23; we note Paul's use of the verb *hystereo* in the text).
 2. But for Jesus' sake St. Paul can happily write, "You do not lack [literally, "are not lacking," in view of the present tense infinitive] any gift of grace as you wait."
 - a. The Corinthians enjoyed many "gifts of grace" (see especially chapters 12-14).
 - b. While the so-called "charismatic gifts," such as tongues and healings, have ceased with the death of the Lord's apostles, we today still enjoy "gifts of grace," the greatest of which are faith and hope and love, as Paul makes clear in chapter 13.
 3. In the Lord's Supper Jesus assures us again and again that all His gifts are ours as He seals His grace and peace by giving us to eat and to drink His own true body and blood.
- B. He promises to keep us faithful to the end.
1. If our continued faithfulness depended on our own wisdom or strength, we should surely lose our salvation, for we are weak in ourselves, even as St. Paul reminded

the Corinthians: "Do not deceive yourselves. . . th wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight' (chapter 3).

2. We may not have it in ourselves to be faithful, but St. Paul writes emphatically, as the Greek text literally reads "Faithful is God. . ." (the Greek word for "faithful" stands first in the sentence whereas the NIV puts it last)
3. God works in us through His word and sacrament to keep us strong to the end (verse 9, where Paul carefully writes "through whom," and not "by whom," suggesting that God works through means).
4. Through word and sacrament God keeps us firm in our confidence that we are "blameless" (verse 8), legally innocent of all sins and all crimes before Him.

Conclusion: Through faith in Christ, then, we do not need to fear our Lord's coming on the last day. Knowing that He has already come into our world as the Savior of the nations and has come into our own lives through His word and sacrament, we are more than ready to meet our king. For our God is a God "who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him."

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THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

December 9, 1990

2 Peter 3:8-14

This text overlaps (in three and a half of its seven verses) with the text concluding, only a fortnight before, Epistle Series A. This study will, therefore, assume the exegetical work already done in connection with the Last Sunday in the Church Year. A sermonic goal differing slightly from the goal suggested there can be found in the additional verses here (11,12,14) and in the new liturgical ambience (Advent). Advent is a penitential season in which we prepare, not only to celebrate well the first coming of the Lord and to receive Him rightly as He comes now in words and sacraments, but also to welcome Him when He comes again—in glory. The problem is that most people are unprepared for the inevitable return of Jesus Christ. The only means to the goal stated above remains the same as a fortnight previous, namely, the promise of God—the second coming is the necessary consequence of the first coming of the Lord Jesus.

As previously noted, 2 Peter 3 foretells a destruction of the universe *quoad formam* in connection with the parousia, but not a destruction *quoad substantiam*. Luther's confidence in the purification and glorification of heaven and earth rests squarely on Scripture, while Gerhard's idea of total annihilation (like all his deviations from Luther's line) fails to do justice to the biblical data. Annihilationism logically recalcitrates against the article of the resurrection, since, according to Scripture, the bodies which we possessed in this world—derived from this earth and returning to it (Genesis 3:19)—are to be ours again, albeit glorified, in the world to come. Holy Writ, in fact, asserts the permanence of this earth both explicitly (e.g., Psalm 104:5) and implicitly, as in those verses which promise its future possession to the faithful (e.g., Matthew 5:5).

The parousia will, to be sure, bring a profound change in the universe (Psalm 102:25-27; Hebrews 1:10-12)—a change so profound as to produce a universe qualitatively new (e.g., 2 Peter 3:13, which uses forms of *kainos*, not *neos*). This change will certainly involve much destruction, but not cosmic disintegration. Our Lord Himself calls it "the regeneration" (*paliggenesia*, Matthew 19:28), while the Apostle Paul promises the deliverance of "the creation" in general from "corruption"—from the curse laid upon it by the fall of Adam (Romans 8:18-23; Genesis 3:17-18). Indeed, he implies a glorification of creation suitable to the habitation of the glorified faithful (cf. 2 Peter 3:13, "in which righteousness dwelleth"). As to the author of the verses under study, the Apostle Peter elsewhere joins the parousia to the "restoration of all things" (*apokatastasis*) predicted "from the beginning" (*ap' aionos*)—clearly the restoration of the universe to the perfection preceding the fall (Acts 3:21).

Also worth noting is the comparison which 2 Peter 3 makes between the effects of the Great Flood and those of the parousia (verses 6-7). The deluge produced, of course, tremendous destruction on a global scale—so much so that verse 6 can speak of "the world (*kosmos*) that then was" as having "perished." Yet although the deluge changed the form of things, the substance remained. The effect of prime importance was the predicted destruction of the prediluvian sinners hardened in impenitence, whom the waters of the flood swept away to eternal perdition (cf. 1 Peter 3:19-20). The same waters destroyed all the products of the sinful prediluvian civilization (except, of course, those carried on the ark). There was, of course, tremendous destruction of flora and fauna as well, but the first post-diluvian promise sets certain restrictions on future acts of God which presumably apply to the parousia as much as to any previous time: "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake. . . ; neither will I again smite any more everything living as I have done" (Genesis 8:21). The regeneration of creation will, of course, mean sweeping

changes in nature (e.g., returning troublesome plants and carnivorous animals to a state preceding the fall or raising them, like the faithful, to a state more glorious than Eden, Genesis 1:29-30; 3:17-18), but scarcely universal wrack and ruin.

Thus, the passage of the heavens in verse 10 clearly refers to form rather than substance, the present form contaminated by human sin giving way to the original perfection or a form yet more glorious. This truth is stated in more precise language by the Apostle Paul: "the fashion of this world (*to schēma tou kosmou toutou*) passeth away" (1 Corinthians 7:31). The addition of *roizēdon* ("with a great noise" [KJV] or "with a roar") emphasizes the suddenness, like the parousia itself, of the transition in nature associated therewith (cf. BAG, p. 744, "with great suddenness"). Both testaments speak of sudden eschatological noise—the voice of Messiah summoning all to divine judgement, joined by angelic choruses and celestial trumpets (Joel 3:16 EV; 4:16 MT; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

The next clause (connected by means of *de not kai*) contrasts with the glorification of the heavens the perdition of the fallen angels: "demons, on the other hand, will be destroyed, being subjected to burning" (not "and the elements shall melt with fervent heat," as the KJV says). The ordinary biblical usage of *stoicheia* refers, not to elements in the modern chemical sense, but to the spirits whom pagans identified with certain material entities, worshipping them under these forms (Galatians 4:3,9; Colossians 2:8,20). The material entities used by the *stoicheia* to usurp divine honours were sometimes the four elementary substances of the ancient world (earth, water, air, fire) but more often the heavenly bodies (which is more in line with the preceding clause here).

The verb *luō* has a basic meaning of "loose," which leads negatively through breakage to destruction, but there is no need to exaggerate the idea with "melt" (KJV) or "dissolve" (Lenski). The Son of God assumed human flesh in the first place "that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8, using *luō*) and, indeed, "that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14, using *katargeō*). The Lord will consummate the destruction of all the devils on judgement day by condemning them to burn forever in the fires of hell (cf. Matthew 25:41; 2 Peter 2:2; Jude 6; Revelation 20:10). Satan suffers, not annihilation, but rather perpetual pain.

The final clause of verse 10 predicts that "earth and the works in it shall be found out." The last word has a number of textual variants, including the one underlying the final words of the verse in several English versions, "shall be burned up." The best reading, however, is clearly *heurethēsetai*, not only because of the manuscripts

containing it (Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, etc.), but also because it alone explains the origin of the numerous variants. Actually the meaning is not so difficult to understand as commentators make it; one need only look to verse 14, where the same word occurs in the same tense and voice (the infinitive *heurethēnai*). The parousia will make manifest the works, as God sees them, of all the people of this earth—the good works of believers and the wicked works of unbelievers (cf. Matthew 25:31-46). Thus, the believers will be “found at peace” with God, “spotless and unblemished in His sight” (verse 14, where the KJV misunderstands *autō* as “of him” instead of “to Him,” that is, “in His sight” by virtue of faith in Christ). The unbelievers, on the other hand, will be found at war with God, filthy and rotten in His sight.

This doom of unbelievers has already received attention in verse 7, which says literally that “the heavens and the earth which now exist. . . are being stored up for fire, being kept for a day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men.” The second participial phrase evidently explains the first and so connects the eschatological fire particularly with the destruction of the wicked. There is no assertion here of a universal conflagration or, indeed, of any annihilation (even of the wicked in particular). Both testaments warn that on the last day the faithless will be condemned, like the demons, to everlasting hellfire (e.g., Isaiah 66:24; Matthew 25:41). This eternal perdition is clearly the “destruction” (*apōleia*) of which verse 7 speaks. At the same time, there are the comparison of the eschatological fire to the waters of the deluge and the assertion of verse 12 that “heavens” (although without the article), “being set afire, shall be destroyed.” Evidently, then, fire will also serve as a divine tool in purging the universe of the results of human sin (cf. Isaiah 1:31).

The word *luō* recurs in verse 11: “all these things being destroyed thus,” that is, in the ways specified by verses 7 and 10. The word then reappears in verse 12, where “heavens, being set afire, shall be destroyed” seems equivalent to “the heavens shall pass away” in verse 10. In other words, the reference is to a destruction *quoad formam* as described in the last sentence of the previous paragraph. The ensuing clause of verse 12 reiterates the eternal perdition of the fallen angels in more colourful language than the corresponding prediction of verse 10, using the present tense of *tēkō* to dramatic effect: “and demons, being subjected to burning, melt.”

Previous studies have already dealt with the significance of “the day of the Lord” in verse 10, which corresponds to “the day of God” in verse 12, to “a day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men” in verse 7, and to “His coming” (*parousia*) in verse 4. Suffice it to add that 2 Peter 3 clearly identifies the second coming of Christ with the final judgement and the last day of history and so excludes the

premillennial theory. C.C. Ryrie, for example, defines the day of the Lord as an "extended period of time, beginning with the tribulation and including the events of the second coming of Christ and the millennial kingdom on earth" (*The Ryrie Study Bible*, p. 1809). The undersigned has demonstrated elsewhere the inadmissibility of interpreting the word *yom* as an age (*CTQ*, 52:4 [October 1988], pp. 265-271). And "the day of the Lord" has already been identified as the *yom-Yahweh* of the Old Testament; indeed, in verse 10 (at least in many manuscripts, including Papyrus 72 and Codex Vaticanus) *hemera kuriou* appears in Hebraic mode without an article. Thus, the arguments against an "age-day" hypothesis refute the chiliasts as much as the evolutionary moderates. Verse 10, in particular, ties up the parousia with the last day in an inextricable knot of simultaneous action. The *New Scofield Reference Bible* attempts an explanation: "The expression 'in which' refers to the close of the Day of the Lord at the end of the millennium, when the destruction of the heavens and the earth ends the Day of the Lord" (p. 1341). Verse 10, however, clearly emphasizes the unpredictable suddenness with which the universal purgation itself will take place, rather than noting as a desultory aside something occurring exactly one thousand and seven years after the sudden beginning of the "tribulation." (The millennium, according to dispensational calculations, is to last exactly a thousand years and the tribulation exactly seven years preceding it.)

Introduction: When children play hide-and-seek, one counts to a previously agreed number and then shouts: "Here I come, ready or not." The Lord, on the other hand, has not told us when He will come again—only that He will come when *He* is ready and so *we* must be ready always. Some people will be prepared to see Him, but most people will be unprepared. The Lord has told us that He will come:

READY OR NOT

- I. Most people will not be ready.
 - A. Now they refuse the Lord of the cross (through unbelief).
 1. They are sinners living lives of impenitence.
 2. They refuse the fruits of His first coming.
 3. They deny His second coming.
 - B. Then they will be terrified of the Lord in glory.
 1. They will see the end of the world they loved.
 2. They will see how rotten they are in His sight.
 3. They will receive eternal damnation.
- II. Some people will be ready.
 - A. Now they receive the Lord of the cross (through faith).
 1. They receive the fruits of His first coming.
 2. They are sinners living lives of repentance.
 3. They desire His second coming.

- B. Then they will rejoice in the Lord in glory.
1. They will see the end of the world they hated.
 2. They will see how pure they are in His sight.
 3. They will receive eternal perfection.

Douglas MacCallum Lindsay Judisch

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

December 16, 1990

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

First Thessalonians 5 is a perfect epistle for Gaudete Sunday. It anticipates the joy of the birth of the Christchild with its opening phrase: "Rejoice always." The rose-colored paraments, rare in today's congregations, give a visible sign to the church that the rejoicing is soon to begin. The season of Advent is not as penitential as that of Lent, for it is as much a season of preparation as a season of repentance, reflecting the two themes of John the Baptist's preaching. As the premier figure in Advent, John's message is the message of Advent, as today's gospel announces. And so, as Reginald Fuller suggests, the joy of Gaudete is different than that of Laetare and Jubilate: "Advent joy is the joy of anticipation, mid-Lent joy that of an oasis in the wilderness, and the joy of Easter that of sorrow which has been turned to joy" (R.H. Fuller, *Preaching the New Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today* [Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1971], p. 292).

Gaudete Sunday recognizes the tension of this Advent season between the now and the not yet. As we wait for the feast of Christmas, we wait as a church that knows three comings of the Lord: the nativity in Bethlehem, the presence of Christ in the gospel and the sacraments, and the *parousia*. In 1 Thessalonians 5 Paul invites us to celebrate God's salvation in the midst of this anticipatory joy and tension with thanksgiving, prayer, and joy (T. Hall and J.L. Price, *Proclamation: Advent-Christmas: Series B* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975], p. 17).

AN ADVENT INVITATION TO CELEBRATE

- I. With thanksgiving that God has visited and redeemed His people (1 Thessalonians 5:18; 1:2; Luke 1:68).
 - A. Repenting of every form of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22; 4:3-12).

- B. Proclaiming salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us and delivered us from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 5:9; 1:9-10).
- C. Living under the cross (1 Thessalonians 2:2; 3:4)
- II. With petitionary prayer that God would keep on saving through His gracious presence among us now (1 Thessalonians 5:17; 1:2).
 - A. Remembering the faith, love, and hope of those who suffer under the cross (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3).
 - B. Imitating those who suffer under the cross (1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:1-12; 3:1-5).
 - C. Petitioning God to visit us constantly with His saving presence (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).
- III. With joy in God's gracious promise to come again in glory (1 Thessalonians 5:16,23).
 - A. Knowing that we are prepared for His sudden appearance (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11).
 - B. Confessing the resurrection of all flesh (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).
 - C. Waiting in peace, sanctified wholly through His blood and our baptism (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Arthur Just, Jr.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

December 23, 1990

Romans 16:25-27

This conclusion to the Letter to the Romans is the longest of the doxologies which close Paul's letters. In it he repeats his wish that the Roman Christians be established in the faith, a theme with which he began this letter (1:11). Because the gospel Paul preached contained God's power to strengthen faith, Paul is moved to praise God. Furthermore, Paul ascribes eternal praise to God because He revealed this "mystery" of the gospel. The term "mystery" here refers to something which would have remained hidden from man unless God had revealed it (cf. 11:25; 1 Corinthians 15:51). Here it is the gospel, which man can only know through the preaching of Christ (verse 25) as witnessed in the prophetic Scriptures (verse 26; cf. 3:21-22).

Introduction: Waiting for anything which seems delayed can make us nervous, anxious, and frustrated. Whether it is waiting for a promised letter or package to arrive in the mail, waiting for a delayed

flight at the airport when a loved one is returning to us, or being put on "hold" on the telephone, we often lose the patience to wait. During the season of Advent we are reminded that we are waiting for Jesus as we look forward to His advent for our salvation. It could be easy for us to experience the same frustration over life's trials which we endure as we await Jesus. However, God has granted us a power which can remove our impatience as we look forward to Jesus' advent:

WE ARE ESTABLISHED IN THE GOSPEL

- I. A mystery revealed to us by God.
 - A. Through the preaching of Jesus Christ.
 1. Who alone gives us true knowledge of our heavenly Father.
 2. By whom we know the Father's love.
 - B. Which shows us God's will.
 1. In the salvation won in Jesus' first advent.
 2. As the prophets of old foretold.

Transition: The gospel reveals to us a loving God whose good will was shown in sending His son to us. This Gospel establishes our faith firmly so that, as we await Jesus' second advent, we can triumph over the trials and tribulations of life by its power and patiently await our Lord.

- II. Which God commanded to be preached.
 - A. To all nations.
 1. So that the gospel's power might be brought to us.
 2. So that we might share in the privilege of bringing the gospel to others.
 - B. For the obedience of faith.
 1. Faith trusts in God's promise.
 2. Faith moves us to do God's will.
 - a. Because of the mercy shown in Christ.
 - b. Guided by God's commandments.
 - C. So that God might receive eternal glory.
 1. For His wisdom in establishing us in the gospel.
 2. Through the preaching of Christ.

Conclusion: We have been established in the gospel because God's command to preach this gospel to all nations brought the gospel to us. As we wait for Jesus' advent we are established in the gospel to do God's will, spread the word of Christ, and thereby glorify God.

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CHRISTMAS DAY

Titus 3:4-7

Titus was a Gentile convert accepted into Christianity without circumcision. The Apostle Paul wrote to Titus to give him personal authorization and guidance in meeting opposition and to give him instruction about faith and conduct. Titus was working mainly with new converts. The Apostle Paul reflected that he and other believers had no excuse for treating the heathen with haughtiness, since it was owing to no merit of their own that they had been saved by Christ.

These verses remind us what we once were. Remembering our own state when the love of God first appeared, we need to watch how we approach the unbeliever. Was it our own works which attracted God's love toward us? We are reminded that, being humble in the remembrance of our own sins and unworthiness, we should deal kindly and lovingly with unruly and sinful men and hope that God's grace would reach them as it has reached and has been impressed upon us.

Introduction: Are there lasting impressions of Christmas? Certainly there may be delightful reminiscences of Christmases past. These are usually experiences enhanced by memory that really do not supply us with the rich assurance that the incarnation of Jesus Christ is intended to give us. In the text Paul directs us to a lasting impression that not only enriches life now, but also assures us of a lasting blessed relationship with our God—to all eternity.

GOD'S LOVE MAKES LASTING IMPRESSIONS

- I. His love is personal.
 - A. The Word appeared, it became flesh, and dwelt among us. This marvelous mystery we celebrate each Christmas and do so again today (verse 4).
 - B. His personal appearance fulfilled the promise of God's redeemer, the Messiah.
 1. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, fulfilling Micah 5:2.
 2. Mary, a virgin, was told by an angel that she would conceive a child, by the power of the Holy Spirit, whose name was to be Jesus ("Savior"), fulfilling Isaiah 7:14.
 3. The heart of the gospel is the good news that Christ died for our sins, fulfilling Isaiah 53:5.
 4. God raised Jesus from the dead, fulfilling Psalm 16:10 and Psalm 49:15.
 5. Jesus will appear again! "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go to heaven" (Acts 1:11).

- C. His personal appearance had and still has broad, far-reaching effects.
 - 1. The loving kindness of the Savior is extended towards all humankind. It is *chrestotes* (verse 4).
 - 2. The loving kindness of the Savior is ineffably generous. It is free, boundless, and poured out on us through Jesus Christ (verse 6).
- II. His love made us partakers in His plan of salvation (verse 7).
 - A. Not by our own works of righteousness (verse 5).
 - 1. We are God's creation and owe everything to Him.
 - 2. We were corrupt and sinful.
 - a. We are still tempted to overlook and forget God's love amidst busy engagements and the snares of everyday life.
 - b. We still have the potential of setting ourselves apart from the unbelievers, forgetting that we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.
 - B. But by His grace and mercy.
 - 1. A special work of His love and mercy occurs in baptism (verse 5).
 - a. There is cleansing and removal of guilt from the soul.
 - b. There is renewal; a new person is created to put forth good works and to exhibit a passion for souls, especially demonstrating love and mercy towards the unbeliever.
 - 2. The administrator of this redemptive love is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit initiates and applies the truth and work of the Son.
 - 3. The medium of this redemptive mercy is Jesus Christ. He finished the work of salvation on our behalf (verse 6).
 - 4. There are results of justification by His grace (verse 7).
 - a. A present hope of eternal life.
 - b. A future reality of being heirs to a heavenly home.
 - 5. The love of God makes a lasting impression. We will never lose Christ. We are forever His—now and unto all eternity.

Conclusion: The saving revelation of God focuses on the incarnation of Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate this day. Remembering why He came, we rejoice with the angelic hosts and with all the people of God that, through Jesus Christ, salvation is certainly ours, a lasting impression for time and for eternity.

Norbert H. Mueller
Jeffrey Walther