

## CHRISTMAS IN JULY . . . OR WHENEVER

Text: Titus 3:3-7

We don't really know when Jesus was born—we don't know the exact year, and we certainly don't know the day or month—but since the days of the late Roman Empire, Christians have always celebrated it on December 25, and since the Roman Empire and lots of artists and hymn writers have been in the Northern Hemisphere, that means that much of the Church thinks of Christmas coming in mid-winter. Now, you folks celebrate Christmas in December, too, but for you that's mid-summer. We certainly don't need to sing about winter chill or picture sleigh rides in the snow to celebrate Christmas, but I have heard that folks here—just for fun, I suppose—do occasionally celebrate Christmas in July. Well, today's text is one of the lessons appointed for Christmas, so today, July 24, in the middle of winter, let's do celebrate Christmas Eve.

Our text today tells us how

“CHRISTMAS”—THAT IS, CHRIST'S COMING—WHETHER IN DECEMBER OR JULY OR WHENEVER HE COMES INTO OUR LIVES—CHANGES US COMPLETELY.

### I.

St. Paul begins our text by telling us that before our “Christmas,” all we knew was every kind of wickedness. **“For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another” (v 3).** Perhaps some of you have heard of the famous English Christian author C. S. Lewis, and maybe you've read his book or seen the movie, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. It's a fantasy about four children who find themselves in a land where it's always winter—heavy snow, temperatures below zero all the time. The land of Narnia is ruled by a wicked snow queen, the White Witch. It's always winter, and the worst part is, there's no Christmas.

Winter without Christmas. In the Northern Hemisphere, in Fort Wayne, Indiana, U.S.A. where I live, we have real winters—lots of snow and cold—but through those winters, with all the cold days and the short sunlight, the one good thing that makes it all okay, the thing we always look forward to in the winter, is Christmas. Winter with no Christmas would be a terrible thing!

This is what Paul is describing in our text: winter with no Christmas. Before the first Christmas, the coming of Christ, the whole world was living one long, dark, cold winter night. Most of the world even had no idea it was Advent—that Christ was *ever* coming. Most of the world was simply going its own sinful, godless way.

Every one of us was once in that same situation. By nature, we didn't know God and His promises. We had no future, no hope. We didn't know there was a Christmas to look forward to. Instead, all we knew was “. . . foolish[ness], disobedi[ce], [going] astray, [being] slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, [being] hated by others and hating one another” (v 3).

Winter with no Christmas, no Christ—only caring for ourselves. Our old sinful nature always goes its own way—“I don't care if my wife wants me home tonight; I'm going out.” Our

old sinful nature can't do anything but give in to its passions—"If I want that woman, I'm going to take her." Our old sinful nature is jealous when a classmate gets an A and I get a C. It hates anyone who doesn't make me feel as if I'm the most important, best looking, smartest guy anywhere. And, by the way, everybody else's sinful nature feels same way—it hates us right back. That's a terrible list isn't it! A horrible description! That's what we all were before Christ came to us. That's what all of us would still be if not for Christmas.

## II.

**“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (vv 5-7). “The goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared.”** That's our Christmas!

This is why this text is used on Christmas—in December or in July. The goodness, the kindness of God appeared when He took on human flesh, appeared as a tiny baby in a manger in Bethlehem. God becoming flesh showed His love, His kindness, toward us. As sinful, selfish, hateful as we were, He had to be very good, very kind, very loving to want to save us.

Especially when it meant going well beyond Christmas—from the manger to the cross. Dying for us who hated Him. Giving His life so that all our malice and envy, our foolishness and disobedience are forgiven.

That **“goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared”** to each one of us whenever the Holy Spirit opened the eyes of our hearts to see Him, to believe in Him. It doesn't matter whether the first Christmas was in December or July or whenever. By the time any us came along, Christmas and Good Friday and Easter had all happened. So from that time on, any person's “Christmas” is whenever Christ comes to him or her.

Christ came to you, appeared to you . . . when in your infant baptism the Holy Spirit told you that Jesus had made you God's child . . . or when a friend told you that Christ has died and risen for you . . . or when you first heard in a sermon that Jesus has done the whole job of saving you. The Holy Spirit used one of those “Christmases” to create faith in your heart. And He keeps doing that every time God's kindness and love in Jesus appear again in the Word and the Sacrament—like right now. See? Today is Christmas in July.

For each one of us, our “Christmases” have made you and me completely new. That is, **“by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, . . . so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (vv 5b, 7).**

Back in Narnia in the C. S. Lewis story *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the turning point is the appearance of Father Christmas. He tells the children that Aslan, the lion, is “on the move.” (Aslan, the lion, is the character that represents Jesus. Eventually in the story, he'll die to save Narnia.) Immediately after Father Christmas's announcement, when Aslan appears, the snow melts; it's summer!

When Christ came to you in your baptism, the washing of regeneration, Paul says, you were renewed by the Holy Spirit. First, you were declared not guilty of all your sins—justified. Then the moment the Holy Spirit created faith in your heart to believe that—that is, you were regenerated—the Holy Spirit created a new you. The new you knows you have eternal life; that's the certain hope that you'll live forever with Christ. And the new you, the believer in Christ, now struggles against the foolishness and disobedience and malice and envy and hate to which

you were once all slaves. You do love your wives, respect the needs of others. You are pleased when a brother in Christ, a fellow student, succeeds. You do keep God's commandments—although imperfectly. Knowing you've been saved, justified by God's grace, you do want to do—and you do!—good works.

Your salvation, the new you, good works are all God's Christmas gifts to you . . . again today—in July. A blessed appearing of Christ to you! Amen.

### **Outline**

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- I. Before our “Christmas,” all we knew was every kind of wickedness.
- II. But our “Christmas” has made each of us completely new.