

**For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.<sup>12</sup> It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,<sup>13</sup> while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,<sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.**  
(NIV84)

Theme: Jesus gives us the true Christmas Spirit

1. His grace moves us to godly lives.
2. His coming leads us to obey his will.

This time of year the term, “Christmas Spirit” is used a lot. If you ask someone what the Christmas Spirit is, you are likely to get a number of different answers. But they all have to do with how we treat others. Around Christmas people are more giving. There is a reason why you see the bell ringers in front of the stores before Christmas. And people seem to be a little nicer to each other as Christmas approaches. It’s part of the Christmas Spirit. It is being hospitable, friendly, and just an overall better person.

And there is nothing wrong with that, in and of itself. In fact it is a noble endeavor—one that God looks with favor upon. But what usually happens after Christmas? Many show their true colors—selfish sinful human beings looking out only for themselves. Today we see that the true Christmas Spirit doesn’t just last a few weeks in December or is motivated by the spirit of the season. Rather the Christmas spirit—the spirit of a Christian lasts all the days of our lives. And its motivation is found in Christ.

For almost as long as Christians have been celebrating Christmas, our text for today has been used as one of the lessons. In the lectionary that we follow it is used for every Christmas Eve. And for good reason. Not because it goes into great detail about Christmas. But rather because it gives a good summary of the work of Christ. Paul mentions it so fast that it is easy to miss what he is saying. In the NIV84 verse 11 reads, **For the grace of God that brings salvation has**

**appeared to all men.** It’s an ok translation. But better would be, **For the grace of God, salvation for all men, has been revealed.**

And this grace, this salvation, has been revealed to all men. This happened on Christmas. On that day Christ, the Lord, was born. Grace is God’s undeserved love that he has for sinners. It is love that God shows us to us even though as sinners we don’t deserve it. On Christmas we see God’s grace in giving us his son. We see God’s love in Jesus in giving up the riches of heaven to live as a meek lowly baby. If we want proof that God truly does love us all we have to see is that little baby in a manger. Jesus is God’s grace.

But he isn’t just God’s grace. Jesus is also salvation. He is saving us from our sins. He is giving us eternal life in heaven forever. When Jesus was conceived and born salvation was conceived and born. Jesus is called salvation because that is what he does—he saves us. Salvation has been revealed to all men because on Christmas God revealed his saving plan. God’s plan in saving his enemies was to send his Son to suffer. It was to send his beloved son to his death. It was to punish his Son with everything because we couldn’t pay the price of our own sins. It was to give us the free gift of eternal life through faith which he also gives us. At Christmas God revealed to us his loving grace in Christ. And at Christmas God revealed to us his plan of salvation—once again only in Christ. Christ, grace, and salvation.

This motivates us to live a Christian life. This gives us the true Christmas spirit. Christ saving us, revealing God’s grace to us motivates us to put aside our selfishness. It leads us to just say “No” to sin. In verse 12 Paul mentions two things we say no to.

**Ungodliness and worldly passions.** Ungodliness is having a general lack of respect for God. And showing that disrespect through your actions. It is living your life without fear of God. It is living your life without taking his will into consideration. We also say “no” to worldly desires. The world wants nothing to do with God and his will. Going after worldly desires can include the pursuit of wealth, sleeping with someone outside of marriage, and doing whatever instead of worshipping God. It is following our sinful nature instead of what God wants us to do.

And the Christmas Spirit—or the Christian’s spirit, says “no” to sin. And instead we say “yes” to God’s will. Paul lists three things we strive to do. He tells us **to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives.** To live a self-controlled life is the opposite of following our worldly passions. It is denying ourselves what our sinful nature wants. It is stopping yourself from doing something you know is wrong. To be upright means to treat others as we would want to be treated. It is loving them as we love ourselves. To be godly is to do what God wants us to do. It is to follow in his footsteps.

Are we able to do this? Can we live a life of self-control, while staying away from ungodliness? No, of course not. We fail to do this numerous times every day. That is why God revealed his grace and plan of salvation to us in his one and only Son. God motivates us to have the Christmas spirit throughout our lives by promising to reveal his glory again.

On Christmas Christ made his first appearance on this earth. And throughout his life he revealed his glory. From the Gabriel’s announcement, to the angels’ Song, to the star above Bethlehem—we see that Jesus wasn’t just a regular baby, he is also God. From Jesus’ baptism, to his transfiguration. From his many miracles, to his speaking with authority and wisdom. They are all revelations of Jesus’ glory. They show us that Jesus is God.

Christ will again reveal his glory on the last day. On that day there will be no mistaking who Jesus is. No one will miss this revelation of his divine glory. That is the hope that we have. Paul said our hope is in **the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.** And did you notice what Paul calls Jesus. **Our God and Savior.** Our God. This is a clear reference to the deity of Christ. Jesus truly is God. And so he is also our Savior.

That is who we wait for—our Savior. As Paul states in verse 14, we wait for the one **who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own.** Christ gave up his life to pay for our sins. He redeemed us, or bought us back by paying the ransom price of his own blood. And that

ransom price bought us back from all wickedness. Christ removed the guilt of all our sins. He paid for our wickedness on the cross. And he also gave us his perfection. He made us holy. He purified us. And he welcomed us into his family. He made us his own. We are now his people. When we were born we belonged to the devil. So he ripped us out of the hands of the devil. And he adopted us as his own. And as his sons we will inherit his gift of eternal life.

Think about these verses again. Remember that the Christian church has been using them for Christmas for centuries. We’ve used them for Christmas even though there isn’t much in this text about Christmas. Rather it is short, concise summary of the life of Christ. From his first appearance which is the grace and salvation of God. To his second appearing on the clouds of heaven. From his act of taking away our sins to his giving us his perfect life.

All this motivates us to have the true Christmas Spirit. This is, the spirit of a Christian. It doesn’t just last for a few short weeks. It lasts a lifetime. The true Christian and Christmas spirit isn’t motivated by the expectations of the season. It is moved and motivated by the grace of God in giving his Son. For we love because he first loved us.

People may have slightly different definitions of the “Christmas Spirit.” God’s definition is simple. It is motivation to live a life pleasing to him because of the work of his Son, Jesus Christ. We gain our motivation for the Christmas Spirit not just in the birth of Christ, but in everything the Lord has done for us. For he is God’s grace and our salvation. Amen.