

Sermon: 1st Sunday after Christmas

Text: Galatians 4:4-7

Theme: The Great Christmas Gifts!

Goal: What God gives us at Christmas comes with us into the New Year

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Another Christmas is over. The special food prepared for the Festival has gone. The gifts we received... do you remember what you received?... 2013 is drawing to an end and a New Year is around the corner. We are looking forward to 2014 and some are making New Year promises.

But the greatest gift Christmas gives us has not gone. It will come with us as we face a New Year and will be with us always to the end of the times: The gift that comes from God, His only begotten Son. With Him we receive all the gifts we need for our eternal life.

Our text tells us about three specific gifts sent by God:

I – God sent His Son

“When the time has fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under Law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”

We preached last Sunday that *the first Christmas was not an event that happened by chance. God had been planning it to take place since long time before.* And “when the time has fully come, God sent His Son.” The Africa Bible Commentary says: *The time was fully prepared in God’s program and also in His governance of the world. He had prepared the world for the spread of the Gospel in many*

ways: arousing an expectation of the Messiah among the Jews; using the Romans to provide peace, security and excellent road network; and establishing a common language, Greek, through the conquest of Alexander the Great” (ABC 1422).

“God sent His Son, born of a woman.” This is, in short, the story of Christmas: God became a man and was born of the Virgin Mary. It was necessary for the Saviour to become one of us in all, but without sin. – I read once a story about a little boy who was playing with his dad and, running, he damaged an ant nest. He became very sad when he saw the ants running desperately trying to save the eggs. The boy said to his dad: I want to help them and give my apology for what I did. Daddy answered: You cannot do it. They will not understand you, unless you are able to become an ant and to talk their language. – This story helps to understand why it was necessary to the Son of God to become one of us. He came to our help, He spoke our language, He did what we were not able to do, that is to reconcile us to God and to make us children of God!

“God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under Law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.” We were under the wrath of the Law because we couldn’t obey the Law perfectly. Jesus put Himself under the Law as we, but He obeyed the Law in all its points. Even being obedient, He suffered the penalty of the transgressors of the Law: the penalty of death! All He did was on our behalf, to redeem us from the Law and from its wrath, and to give us the full rights of sons of God! Through Jesus and by faith in Him, we are not enemies of God anymore, we are not slaves of the sin and of the Law anymore, but we are adopted children of God with all the rights as a legitimate child. (We will talk more about our rights later). Jesus in the manger, Jesus on the cross, Jesus resurrected - is the grand gift of God to us at Christmas.

II – God sent us His Spirit

And “because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out Abba Father”. God sent us not only His Son, but also His Holy Spirit, who lives in us as in His temple. Jesus had promised: “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth...the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything” (John 14:15, 25). This happens when we are baptized and believe in Jesus. In Baptism God declares us His beloved children, and through His Word and the Sacrament He preserves us in His grace. *Through the Gospel, the Holy Spirit enables us to acknowledge God as our Father* (Series A 32).

I like this text, “the Spirit who calls out Abba Father”. The first prayer I learnt as a little child was *Abba, lieber Vater. Amen*. This means: Abba, dear Father. Amen. Abba is the Hebrew word for dad, daddy. God is not a God from far, but He came close to us in His Son Jesus, who gives us the right to call God in a very intimate way: Our Father who art in heaven.

Paul wrote to the Romans in Chapter 8:26, 27: “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express... and the Spirit intercedes for us in accordance with God’s will.” – We have a strong partner in our prayers. When we become tired of praying, or when it seems that God is not listening to our prayers, the Holy Spirit still intercedes for us. The Spirit of God knows what the best for us is and we have to rely on Him, always remembering that God’s plans are better than our plans. Our hope is not only for this life, but our eyes are fixed on the eternal life.

III – We are God’s heirs

Let’s go back, what it means to “receive the full rights of sons”. What do you think are the full rights of a son? ...The text explains: “So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir!” God’s heir! Many people long for an inheritance from a rich relative to solve their financial problems or just to have a good status. God makes us heirs of His properties and of His blessings. His house will be ours! Can we desire any more than this? No matter how much we inherit in this life, we are not able to take any of them with us when our departure time comes. But God’s inheritance is guaranteed and secure. Our oldest brother, Jesus, Son of God, opened the way for us and went ahead of us to prepare room for us in the house of the Father. This is our faith, this is our hope.

Conclusion: The Son of God enters this human family so that we might belong to the heavenly family... What shall we then say to these things as we face the year ahead? If God be for us – and for us in such an unexpected and indescribable manner, sending us His Son, sending His Holy Spirit, and making us His heirs, - who or what can be against us? (Series a 31, 32). “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”

(Romans 8:35, 37-39).

Have all a Blessed New Year in the promises of our God. Amen.