Paul’s letter to Titus is a lot like those cheery Christmas letters we receive each year. Paul reminds us of the wonderful things that happened recently and of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. He speaks of what is to come in the glorious future when Christ comes again. “The grace of God has appeared” he writes. That captures all that God has done prior to and including the arrival of Jesus: the creation of the world, the covenant wit Noah, Abraham, and Moses; the care for the Israelites in exile; the promises to David of an everlasting throne; and so much more. *The grace of God*, the unmerited gift of salvation and redemption for the world, *has appeared*. It is a done deal. Christ has already achieved our salvation. It is real here and now.

And that salvation is for *all* people, not just for a chosen few. Jesus appeared to and brought salvation to all who believe on his name, just as the angel declared: “I am brining you good news of great joy for all people” (Luke 2:10).

Paul’s words to Titus suggest how we are to live in this time in-between, knowing that the grace of God is with us and while we wait to claim our eternal salvation. Paul is clear, in verse 12, how we ought to live as people already redeemed: the grace of God trains us “*to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.*”

This captures the full range of the spiritual life. To live with **self-control** is to live in harmony with oneself. To live an **upright** life means to live in harmony with others, seeking their welfare. To live in a **godly** manner is to live in harmony with God, submitting ourselves to God’s will and purpose. In just three words, Paul shows us that every relationship deserves our fullest commitment to love and reconciliation.

In our journey through Advent, we’ve had a panoramic view of the Christmas story. We witnessed the urgency of John the Baptist’s message to prepare ourselves for the coming of Jesus. We faced the cold, hard reality of Matthew’s depiction of life, and emerged more confident because God is here with us. We sang with Mary the words of hope and transformation in Luke’s Gospel, amazed by the uplifting power of this great, Good News. And in John, we dared to hold a candle of hope against the darkness of the world.

Four Gospels, four perspectives, four ways of holding onto expectation and hope. So, how should we await what has already happened? By slowing down, turning our lives around, and making a straight path for Jesus to come amongst us. By trusting God amid our fears and learning to experience God’s presence in every moment. By singing a song of obedience, both to be blessed by God and to be used by God as a blessing to the world. By claiming the light of God, which we may sometimes see most clearly amid our darkness and reflecting that light for others. By living sensible, ethical, and godly lives, wholly devoting ourselves to God’s purpose.

Jesus as Paul left Titus behind to complete the work he began; Jesus left his followers behind to complete his work of transforming the world. That work continues today in us and we are called to keep the faith alive and growing. Jesus came to bring peace and justice to the world; we are here to continue his mission bringing all people, friends and strangers alike, the loving grace of God. Merry Christmas! In the name of the Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to focus on you today, remembering that the gift of Christ, Immanuel, is our most treasured gift for the whole year through. Fill us with your joy and the peace of your Spirit. Direct our hearts and minds towards you. Thank you for your reminder that both in seasons of celebration and in seasons of brokenness, you’re still with us. You never leave us. Thank you for your daily Presence in our lives, that we can be assured your heart is towards us, your eyes are over us, and your ears are open to our prayers. Thank you for surrounding us with favor as with a shield, we are safe in your care. We choose to press in close to you today… In Jesus’ name, Amen.

**Paul’s Christmas Letter**

Christmas Day, December 25, 2022 Titus 2:11-13

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

It’s Christmas morning and I’m guessing that you received your share of Christmas letters from family and friends this year. At some point people decided that a simple Christmas card wasn’t enough to share the spirit of the holidays. Nowadays, we send a kind of “year in review” with our cards. And so, it seems like a good time to hear Paul’s “Christmas Letter” as he shares with Titus about the wonder of Christ’s incarnation.

Titus 2:11-13, NRSV

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and world passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly; while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” *This the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.*

The opening of this passage could be called the prefect Christmas tweet: “**the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all!**” It really is the Christmas message in a single sentence. Just 47 characters. Taken together with the rest of the passage, however, this is not just the Christmas message, but the message of the whole Gospel. The birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus are summed up in a single word: GRACE.