

### His Birth, Our Adoption

**<sup>4</sup> But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy—through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. <sup>6</sup> He poured out his Spirit on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior <sup>7</sup> so that, having been justified by his grace, we may become heirs with the hope of eternal life.**

The Christian Standard Bible. Copyright © 2017 by Homan Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible®, and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers, all rights reserved.

**<sup>4</sup> But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared, he saved us.** What a beautiful way to describe Christmas. When Jesus was born, God's kindness and love appeared. But that is also an odd way of putting it. When a baby is born we all go "ooo" and "ahhh" over the child and say how cute he or she is. But this description of Jesus Christ focuses solely on God the Father. It is like a birthday party, but the focus is on the parents, not the birthday boy or girl. Presents are given to the parents and folks remark what a remarkable job they have done.

But that is the point Paul is making in our text. The birth of Jesus, Christmas, is really about God and how much he loves us. And because he loves us by sending Jesus, it then becomes a message about us. Today we will see how the birth of Jesus affects us. Because of his birth, we are now the adopted children of God.

#### *I. His Birth*

**<sup>4</sup> But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared, he saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy ...** Do you know what a philanthropist is? He is usually a very rich person who decides to do something to help out people. Bill Gates, the second richest man in the world and worth over \$100 billion dollars, has pledged through his Gates Foundation \$1 billion through 2023 to fight malaria in Africa. Bill Gates is a philanthropist. There are many philanthropists out there who give generously to this cause or that cause.

**<sup>4</sup> But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared, ...** The Greek word for love or love for mankind is *philanthropia* where we get the word "philanthropist." It means to love humans. Bill Gates may save several thousand lives. I hope he does and I hope all philanthropists do well. But notice he gives only a portion of what he owns. Philanthropists donate a lot and try to help, but they donate only a portion of what they have to help only some people.

Compare that to Jesus. **<sup>4</sup> But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared, he saved us.** Here is that word, philanthropy. Bill Gates is willing to give a portion of what he owns to help out some people. Jesus was willing to come in the flesh and gave everything he had, his very own life, to save every man, woman and child that ever lived or will live. He was born in order to save us.

Why did he do this? **<sup>5</sup> he saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy.** Just one verse before our text we find this description of mankind: **For we too were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved by various passions and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, detesting one another.** This is not the description of some drunken people wandering out of a bar. This is a description of all humanity. It is a look into the human heart and it shows how us what lurks in it and how we all fall short of God's glory.

Maybe we should take a small break here and discuss what a work of righteousness is. What Bill Gates and other philanthropists do is a good thing. They certainly help people. But are such good things righteous before God? It says in Isaiah 64 says, **All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.** To be righteous before God means to be clean. You don't bake a chocolate cake in the pan your husband uses to change the oil in the car. It will taste like the oil. Likewise, our actions are only as righteous as the hands and feet and hearts that do them, and if we are tainted with sin, those righteous acts are also tainted with sin. They come out as filthy rags with sin attached to them in one way or another.

Thank God that there are folks who do a lot of good in this world, but all this good is good before man, but they are not righteous before God because sin is attached. That is why God saves us. Even the good we do is tainted with sin and filthy before God. He can't save us because of our righteous deeds. He saves us because he wanted to. He saves us because of his kindness and philanthropic love for all mankind. This baby in Bethlehem will fulfill all that God wants for us. Love sent Jesus into this world. Love sent him to the cross where he makes everything right or righteous between the sinner and God. It is his blood that washes away the guilt of your sin. Every action and thing Jesus did is righteous. No sin is attached. So his righteousness becomes our righteousness.

Dear friends, we never depend on what we have done or who we are to save us. We can't. Depend solely on his kindness and love alone. "Nothing in my hand do I bring, simply to thy cross I cling." This is how we are saved.

## II. Our adoption.

So, Bill Gates has pledged over a billion dollars to fight Malaria in Africa. Right now, that good intention is doing no one any good. He made a pledge. Fine. But for it to help people, he must find an organization or several that can actually do something about the malaria. Then he has to contact them and write a check to them so they can take the money and spend it on medicine and research. It is the same with our salvation. God's kindness and love appeared. Good. Jesus died for our sins. That is wonderful. How can that salvation reach us? God thought of a way. It is Baptism.

...<sup>5</sup> **he saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy—through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit.** It is not Baptism that saves you. Jesus saves you. But he saves you *through* Baptism. This is why we call it a Means of Grace. As water comes through a pipe, God's grace and salvation comes to us through the Means of Grace. One means is his Word for faith comes from hearing the message. Another is Communion, not through the bread and wine but through the Word connected with it. And the same is true with Baptism. Jesus told us to use simple water and then to connect it with God's Word and through it he showers us with his grace and faith.

... **through the washing of regeneration.** Regeneration means to be born again. In Baptism the sinner is born again. Makes you think of Jesus when he spoke of this very same thing to Nicodemus in John chapter 3, **I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.** Think about it. You have two birthdays. One caused by your parents. The second caused by God the Holy Spirit. That is why Baptisms sometimes are referred to as "christenings," the day this person is clothed in Christ.

As a result we are adopted as God's dear children. <sup>6</sup> **He poured out his Spirit on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior** <sup>7</sup> **so that, having been justified by his grace, we may become heirs with the hope of eternal life.** Sometimes folks leave a part of their inheritance to a cause like the foundation that was started here by members long ago. But usually, an inheritance is promised to children. As sinners we were outside the Kingdom of God. Because of Christ we are adopted as God's children through Baptism. Our names are written on the will as heirs awaiting eternal life. Think about that the next time you drive by the cemetery. The believers there are awaiting their inheritance.

And finally, something else happens to us. ..., **through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit.** "Renewal." A synonym would be renovate. I saw a video of a guy who came upon a civil war era hatchet that didn't even look like a hatchet because of all the rust and caked on mud. But he restored it and made it brand new. Go to the Cancer Cruise here in Arlington. See all the cars that have been renewed or renovated. And he does the same with us.

Do you think that the Holy Spirit moved into your heart and then moved out the next day or moved on to the next person like the tooth fairy? No. He came to stay. He makes our bodies his temple and like any new tenant, he remodels the place. Yes, some folks sadly kick him out. Others starve him by not continuing in God's Word. But you believe because of the Holy Spirit and he is staying with you so you stay a believer.

This renewal is not a one-time thing. It is every day. It is like asking your child to make his or her bed. They might object and say, "Why? I will only mess it up again tonight." But if you take their logic one step further, then I guess you should never brush your teeth because you are only going to dirty them again, or you should not take another shower or bath since you are only going to get dirty again. That is very bad advice. If you don't brush your teeth, your teeth will eventually get bad and maybe need to be pulled. If you don't bath, you just get sweatier and dirtier. You will surely lose friends.

Renewal means we brush and bath every day. We were renewed by the Holy Spirit at our Baptism. He is still there renewing us each day. Take a bath in your Baptism every day, confessing your sins and being washed clean in Christ. Live the new clean life you have in Christ, live as the children of God and not of this world, live like God in holiness and righteousness. And at the end of the day you find yourself dirty again with sin, go back to God. Bath in your Baptismal water.

Baptism is precious to his Church and it is precious to our church. That is why the sea shell which represents Baptism is a symbol of our church. How many Baptisms do you think were performed in our church the past 150 years? Take a guess. They just made the list from our records. The number is 2,964. That's a lot of water. Just think of how many souls God reached through Baptism through our congregation. But Baptism still serves us. Like a fish, stay in your Baptismal water. See how the birth of Jesus leads to your adoption as God's Children and heirs of eternal life. Amen.