

Christians, how will your life be different after today? Maybe you think that's an odd question to ask. Because we probably think of Christmas as just another holiday, and holidays are not usually the kind of days we think of as life-changing events. We don't come to Labor Day, for example, and expect to be a different person afterwards. And we don't come to the Fourth of July thinking that it's going to make us a better person than we were before. Yes, we're thankful for the things that these things remember, for the people that it commemorates. And we might even feel reflective on a day like Memorial Day for all the things which we have. But I would probably suspect that holidays are mostly days that we're thankful to have a day off, a time to be with family, and so forth. But we don't usually think of them as something that is going to change our lives.

But Christians, it is true! We will not be the same people after today. Because Paul shows us in Titus chapter 3 that today is no ordinary day. Christmas remembers the most important event in the history of the world. Jesus Christ has been born of the Virgin Mary, and because of that our lives will never be the same again!

And so Paul shows us this in Titus chapter 3 by talking to a young man who was struggling with this. A man who was struggling with Christians who didn't seem to be living different lives at all. Because Titus was a young man that Paul left on Crete. And Titus' job was to oversee the spread of the Gospel there. He was supposed to plant churches, and to appoint pastors, and to resolve disputes, and all of those things. Basically what Paul was doing everywhere else. That was what Titus was supposed to do. But Titus was having a pretty rough time of it. He was having a rough time in Crete not only because he was struggling with false teachers, but also because of the Cretans themselves. The Cretans had a reputation in the ancient world of being a wild, rough, and unruly people. In fact, Paul says in Titus chapter 1: "One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said: 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.' This testimony is true." And so while it was true that some of them were just not following God at all--they weren't doing what they're supposed to do at all--even in the churches, the people were struggling. It seemed like they kept falling back into their old habits, like fighting with each other or giving into their old sins. And so Titus was discouraged. He wanted to know: "Well, it doesn't seem like anything is changing, so what am I supposed to do? How am I supposed to help these people when it seems like they never change?"

But what does Paul say to him then? Does he say: "That's life? You just have to deal with it? What else did you expect?" Does Paul say: "We're all sinners, so there's really nothing you can do about it anyway?" Not at all. Paul tells him to look to something new, that something has changed in the lives of us as Christians. As we hear in chapter 3, verse 3: "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." Now, that's a long list of sins, of course. Things that I'm sure that the Cretans were struggling with. But notice what he says: "You were once these things." You were once foolish. You were once disobedient. You were once led astray, and so forth. This was once true of you, but it is no longer. Something has changed, and this is not who you are today.

So what has changed? Paul goes on to say in chapter 3, verse 4: "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared." When the goodness and the loving kindness of

God, that is, God the Father appeared. But when did this appear? When did he show us his goodness and his loving kindness? He first showed it to us in a manger in Bethlehem. Because the Father has sent his Son into the world to save us from our sins. Jesus has come into the world to make us different from who we once were. And as Paul goes on to say: "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy." It's a salvation we didn't deserve. We didn't earn it, as if we did all the right things and so God sent Jesus into the world as a reward. No, the Cretans didn't deserve it, and certainly neither do we. But God sent his Son to be our Savior and to set us free. He has given us Jesus purely out of his mercy in order to save us.

And how does he save us? Paul goes on to say: "By the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior." The Father and the Son have given us the Holy Spirit to make us the Christians that we are. And that happened, Christians, in the washing of renewal, in the waters of your Baptism. Because when God baptized you, he gave you everything that he had done for you. We have been reborn, we have been regenerated, we have been renewed, made different from what we were before. The waters of Baptism have washed that all away and made us different in God. "So that," as Paul goes on to say, "being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." You have been declared righteous, declared just in the sight of God, as if you had never sinned, and made an heir of heaven even though you didn't deserve it. And all of this has happened by the free grace and mercy of God our Savior.

But Paul drives the point home when he goes on to say in verse 8: "The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people." Everything that Paul's been talking about leads us to good works. Not because we need to earn it. Not because it's somehow what we're just supposed to do after God's done everything else for us. Nothing of the sort. Rather, it leads us to good works because God has changed us through his Son. Jesus was born, Christians, so that you would no longer be a slave to sin. Jesus was born so that you would no longer walk in darkness. Jesus was born so that you are now an heir of heaven.

So why, then, why would we turn back to sin? Why would we go back to what we once were? That is not who you are. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit through your Baptism has made you different, has made you new, has made you like him. So yes, our lives will never be the same again.

So Christians, let us not leave today the same as what we were before. Let us not leave Christmas morning only to fall back into the sins that we once did. Jesus Christ has been born in order to save us. And knowing that, let us follow him, because we belong to him forever. Christmas is a day which changes us, because Jesus has been born.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank you for the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ, who has come into the world to save us. Help us always to follow after him, because you have made us new through him. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.