If this text had been read in place of Luke 2 during our Christmas services, you might have felt something of a letdown. Paul’s words do not sound like Christmas. There is no mention of Bethlehem’s stable, manger, angels or shepherds.

But these words would have been very much in place during our Christmas services because they express Paul’s view of Christmas. Paul approaches Jesus’ birth from a different angle than Luke does. Yet both inspired writers teach us priceless truths about Christmas.

Things like a stable, manger, angels and shepherd’s field are important parts of the Christmas story, but we do not always take them with us into our daily lives and world. Like the nativity sets we will soon pack away into boxes, the scenery and characters of the first Christmas may soon be forgotten, especially when we are confronted by things like sickness, inflation, war, sin and death.

Although such troubles of life seem to blend into the background at Christmas, they invariably return, and when they do, a stable and manger will not do us much good – unless they have some substance.

That is why these words of Paul are so timely. They lend real, lasting substance to the stable and manger we have just seen. They remind us that those things were not the whole story or message, but the historical backdrop of the Christmas message of God’s love. So let’s look at Paul’s view of Christmas. We will see God’s perfect Christmas gift and what it means to us.

Some of the Christmas presents we received as a child we never forget. They were the timely, the needed and thoughtful gifts like the bike, that much-wanted doll or the electric train. They made us hate to see Christmas pass, but they also made Christmas last a little longer.

With all the pre-Christmas rush we experience, we adults almost breathe a sigh of relief when Christmas is over. It is not that we have not received one of those really thoughtful, needed and enduring Christmas gifts. We have. We have received the most needed and lasting gift of all. It was God’s perfect Christmas gift, wrapped in swaddling clothes.

We saw that gift in the manger this past week. But did we take a close look at it? Paul did and he share with us what he saw. He saw, not just a man, not just God, but the God-man. He saw God’s son, born of a woman, born under law. And Paul saw Jesus as having been sent to redeem those under law.

It was a timely Christmas gift. When we were born, we were placed under God’s law and that is not a healthy situation for us. It meant we were obligated to keep all the commands of God’s law.

But we could never do that. We sin everyday in thoughts, words and actions. The consequences of this are disastrous. Paul writes earlier in Galatians: Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the Law.

God’s Christmas gift was also a thoughtful one. Paul does not mentioned it here, but he saw something else. He saw a child born in Bethlehem becoming a curse for us.

That is just what we needed. Only the God-man could become cursed in our place and still endure that curse. Only the God-man could keep the law perfectly, die our death and still rise to live forever. He did it all for you and for me. He did it to redeem us – to make us members of God’s family.

By nature, we were not part of God’s family. By nature, we were rebellious, we have strayed from our Father’s house and separated ourselves from his love. God intended that all people be his beloved children. He was all set to pour his blessings on mankind, but sin
changed all that – not only for Adam and Eve, but also for all their descendants. The corruption of sin has now become a part of our natural inheritance. Hostility toward God and opposition to his will have been passed down from generation to generation. People are not born into this world as members of God’s family, but the devil’s. And every sin that is seen is just more evidence of that terrible, universal fact.

But God took pity on us and sent his one and only Son to bring us back into his family. Jesus came to battle Satan for us and to become our older Brother. He paid the ransom necessary to free us from the slavery in which we had become caught. He assured us of God’s love and forgiveness. Because of Jesus, we are part of God’s family. **We are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for as many as of us have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.** Jesus made us children of God and heirs of eternal life.

By calling us sons, Paul reinforces the fact that we now have a special relationship with God. The customs of Paul’s day dictated that the sons in the family received the father’s inheritance; the oldest son was especially favored and often had the responsibility of distributing the inheritance. What higher honor and greater comfort could we possibly receive than that which we already have in knowing that Jesus himself is our older Brother and that God calls us his sons?

Tomorrow we will be starting a new year. Maybe you are eager to leave 2017 behind. Maybe you are a bit hesitant about beginning a new year. But for 2018 to be a good year, the Lord will have to guide us and bless us. God will have to bring many things to pass. But will he?

Thinking of our many sins, we realize God would have every reason not to favor us sinners or even so much as look in our direction. But if we view Christmas the way Paul did, something comes through loud and clear. Christmas says: All in due time. The first Christmas was something many people longed for and eagerly awaited. It was a wonderful event God had promised during the centuries before Christ’s birth.

**When the time had fully come** God sent his Son. Christmas took place when God thought the time was right for it. So there is no reason to fear God might not bring things to us in the new year. We are longing, hoping and waiting for food, clothing, shelter, protection and other blessings. God has promised us such good things, even as he promised the world the first Christmas.

God saw that it happened in due time. He saw to it even though it meant sending his own dear Son. Surely he will in due time also bring these lesser things to pass for us. After all, God loved us enough to send his Son at Christmas. As the Bible says: **He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things.** Indeed, all things good and necessary will come in due time.

That is the confidence that results from seeing Christmas from Paul’s point of view. Paul’s point of view of Christmas also gives us the confidence of eternal life in heaven. If you died tonight, what would you have? Humanly speaking, you would have nothing. You cannot take your possessions with you when you die.

But what would you have spiritually, in terms of eternity, if you died tonight? The Bible often speaks of God the Father having an inheritance waiting for us. In Matthew, Jesus says to the sheep on his right: **Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.** Jesus is talking about the rich joy and unending bliss of heaven, those wonderful mansions he has prepared for us.

Many people, even some Christians, are doubtful about that being theirs: **I sure hope it will be mine,** they say. But the tone of the their voice and the expression on their face
reveal a feeling of uncertainty and fear. The reasons for this are obvious. We have sinned and given our heavenly Father every reason to disown and disinherit us.

Think about earthly inheritances. Do we ever have doubts about inheriting the estate of our earthly father? Of course not. We are confident of inheriting what belonged to our father. After all, we are his sons and daughters.

It is no different with our heavenly Father. Paul writes: Since you are a son, God has also made you an heir. We are God’s sons and daughters. That was the express purpose of God sending his Son at Christmas: to redeem those under law, so he might adopt us as his own sons and daughters.

Because of his life, death and resurrection, Jesus completed our adoption process. So it is certain, then. We are heirs of heaven. And we are not just living in anticipation of our inheritance. Even now we possess it.

Our inheritance is not second rate either. The Bible says: We are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. We would partake of everything that is his, if we died tonight. This is also what we have as we live right now.

But some people say you can never be sure, not until the Last Day. Paul would beg to differ and so do we. Paul mentions that we call our Abba, Father. Abba was a common word among the Jews. It is the equivalent of our word Dad. To call out means to pray.

But it is not our nature to call God our Father. Our mind is sinful by nature and the sinful mind is hostile to God. Yet we pray to God as our Father. According to Paul, the fact that we call him Abba. Father, is a sign that we are God’s sons.

Paul says it is the spirit of Jesus in our hearts that moves us to call on God in this way. That spirit is not in us by nature, but Jesus said he and his Father would give the spirit to us. Paul here not only tells us God has done that for us, but he also tells us why God has done that. He says God has given the Spirit of his Son because he considers us to be his sons, his children.

There we have it, then, a sign that we are God’s sons, not only in Paul’s estimation, but in God’s estimation as well. It is a sign as obvious, near and personal as the fact that we pray to God and call him Father.

Since we are God’s children now, Paul’s view of Christmas also reminds us that we will then want to act as his grateful, obedient children. We know that a child’s conduct can damage his parents’ reputation. May our life lead people to praise our Father in heaven and not dishonor him. We will let our light shine before others that they may see our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven. Let’s live according to what we believe. Let’s live and act as true sons by imitating our Father in heaven.

It is easy to look only at the stable, manger and shepherds when thinking of Christmas. But Paul’s view of Christmas is not a cold, theoretical or impractical view. It promises to help make Christmas an even more heart-warming, never-to-be-forgotten happening for you. The hope and expectation aroused in us today by Paul’s view of Christmas are things we can truly take with us now and count on all year long. Amen.

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