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Christmas II
5 January 2014
Grace and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Ephesians 1:3-14

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Our Epistle today is a word of comfort—
praising God for who He is and what He's done for us in Christ.

In fact, as you look over today's Epistle, notice how many times St. Paul says,
“*in Christ*,” or “*in Him*,” or “*in the Beloved*.”

In Christ, we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph 1:3).

In Christ, we have been chosen to be holy and blameless (1:4).

In Christ, we are predestined for adoption as sons (1:5).

In Christ, we have the glory of His grace (1:6),
redemption and the forgiveness of sins (1:7),
wisdom and insight (1:8),
knowledge of the mystery of His will (1:9),
and the completion and summation of all things (1:10).

Everything there is and everything we have and everything we are is *in Christ*.

Apart from Christ, or *outside* of Christ, there's no blessing,
no calling, no choosing, no predestining, no sonship,
no glory, no grace, no redemption, no forgiveness,
no wisdom, no prudence, no knowledge,
and things aren't the way they ought to be.

It's all about Jesus.

In Christ, everything is set right, the way it was intended, according to His will.

And you are *in Christ*.

You were chosen before the foundation of the world
and predestined to be *in Christ*.

By the blood of Christ you've been redeemed, forgiven all your sin.
Everything that cut you off and separated you from God has been forgiven, put away—
all through what Christ has done for you.

You've been brought into Christ; and in Him you have everything.

That's all good, but what about the others?

What about those *outside* of Christ, or *apart* from Him?

Are they not adopted?

Are they not chosen or predestined or redeemed?

What does that say about God?

Why are some be saved, while others not?

These questions are troubling.

They're very real—

we all know someone dear to us who, for whatever reason, stands apart from Christ.

What about them?

Can't God save them anyhow?

Isn't God bigger than Christ?

Here's the problem: we think of God and salvation as if they exist apart from Christ.

We have this idea of heaven or joy or peace or any other goodness,

apart from the Crucified Son of the Most High God.

But again, listen carefully to what St. Paul says,

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace...” (1:7)

The blood of Christ has secured redemption—

not only for us church-goers;

but also for the entire world.

Redemption and forgiveness are for everyone in Christ.

A bit more from St. Paul,

“which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.” (1:8-10)

Since the very beginning—indeed, before the beginning—

God's will is to unite all things in Christ.

That word “to unite” is a rich word.

The Greek, *anakephalaiomai*, literally means, “to bring together to a head,”

or “to bring to completion, to summarize, to finish.”

The Latin is *recapitulare*, “to recapitulate.”

The point here is really quite profound:

in Christ God's will and work and word is fulfilled, complete, done the way He intended.

So, to be apart from Christ—

to not hear the Gospel, to be cut off from His voice in the Church;

is to stand outside of God's will for you.

In fact, to be apart from or outside of Christ is to be apart from or outside of God.

And God desires that all would be united to Him in Christ.

His will, since the foundation of the universe,

is to bring together all of creation and unite Heaven and Earth.

And that happens *in Christ*.

The Heavenly, eternal Son of the Father—the Logos; the Word—
has taken on human flesh; was born of the Virgin Mary; has become man.

In Jesus Heaven and Earth meet.
The finite and the infinite share the same space.
God's eternal will is for you to be included in that space.
And that space is the Church, where heaven stoops down to earth for you.

And again, *you are in Christ; you are a member of His Church, which is His body!*

How?
Through His grace and love.
He made you His own by Baptizing you into Christ—by bringing you into Him.
With that water He joined His Word of the Gospel, uniting Himself to you.
And the seal—the guarantee, the down payment of all the blessings that are yours in Christ—
is the Holy Spirit.

He is the sure and certain proof that we are *in Christ*.
He testifies to the Father and prays for us daily.
He guides our feet by His Word.
He points us constantly to Christ.
And He daily forgives our sin.

What we have now is a taste of what's to come.
We have a taste of love and community in this Church.
We have a taste of the heavenly banquet as we dine on the flesh and blood of Christ.
We have a taste of the justice, and the truth, and the peace that's ours in eternity.
But there's more to come.

*“As a plan for the fullness of time,
to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.” (1:10)*

All things aren't yet brought to completion in Christ.
Some of us are still trying to live and believe apart from Him.
And there are others too.
Others who don't know the inheritance that's to be had in Christ.
Others who don't know even the taste of peace or the glimmer of truth.
Others who don't know that God has done all this for them in Christ *by His love for them*.

We offer them no help by considering such a thing as god apart from Christ.
We offer no help by weakening our confession or by careless living.

But just as we have obtained this inheritance apart from anything we've said or done,
let us also proclaim the word of truth, the Gospel of salvation to all people,
that all would be brought to completion, the way they ought to be, *in Christ alone*.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit