

Gift-giving: I can't count the number of times people have told me how much they dread Christmas shopping! But I don't think it's because we don't like giving gifts. We love to give our loved ones gifts. But I think the shopping part of the gift-giving is the thing we dread.

God is a great gift-giver. When he gave us his Son, Jesus, he gave us the greatest gift that we could ever receive: the gift of salvation. But what does that mean exactly? In his letter to the church in Ephesus, St. Paul wrote about this. This morning we're going to talk about what this has to do with our daily walk with the Lord and with each other.

## OPENING PRAYER

### EPHESIANS 1:3-14

**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.**

**<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight<sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. <sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,<sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.**

**<sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,<sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.**

St. Paul wrote, **Ephesians 1:3-6**, “**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who [that is, the Father] has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,** <sup>4</sup> **even as he [the Father] chose us in him [Jesus] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him [the Father]. In love** <sup>5</sup> **he [the Father] predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his [the Father’s] will,** <sup>6</sup> **to the praise of his [the Father’s] glorious grace, with which he [the Father] has blessed us in the Beloved [Jesus].”**

This first part of the lesson is about our relationship to God the Father, that he has given us “**every spiritual blessing.**” Spiritual blessings are gifts for the heart and spirit which we need in order to live in harmony with the Spirit of God and each other. We know that “**God is love,**” (1<sup>st</sup> **John 4:8**) so one of the blessings he gives us is love. We know that God is patient, so one of his blessings is patience. We know that God is faithful, kind, and generous, so God’s blessings for us include all of these things as well.

On the personal application side—such as being patient and kind—we might examine our lives, thank God for his gifts, and then pray that he would multiply them in us.

We also read that our Father in Heaven “**chose us in (Jesus) before the foundation of the world,**” that “**he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ.**” This is where we get the idea of the sanctity of life; we believe that a person is conceived in the heart of God even before they are conceived in the womb. God knew you, had a plan for you, loved you even before you were born.

The other important thing we learn here about our salvation is that God adopted each one of us as his “**son.**” In Bible times, the first born son inherited his father’s entire estate. What Paul is telling us is that you and I are like the first born son of our Father in Heaven. Everything he has belongs to us. For this too we’re thankful, for we didn’t do a thing to deserve it.

The next section in this reading is about the blessings we receive from Jesus. St. Paul wrote, **Ephesians 1:7-12**, “**In [Jesus] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,** <sup>8</sup> **which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight**<sup>9</sup> **making known to**

**us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ<sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.<sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,<sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.”**

Earlier we read about how the Father predestined us to be his sons with an inheritance in Heaven, and now we see that Jesus is a part of this blessing too. We don't distinguish between the three persons of the Holy Trinity as if they were three gods. However, we do distinguish between the different roles they each have in our lives.

For example, we see here that through Jesus we have **“redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.”** Our redemption is only attributed to him, for only he shed blood on our behalf, for the forgiveness of our sins on the Cross.

We also read that through Christ, God has revealed to us **“the mystery of his will,... as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him....”**

The **“fullness of time”** came with Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection, thus uniting us in faith, making us one body with many members with a single mission to be a blessing to the world.

As we do our work here in the church we might remind ourselves of this unity, and pray that we might be spiritually one in Christ for the fulfillment of his mission.

The last section of this reading is about the Holy Spirit. St. Paul wrote, **Ephesians 1:13-14, “In [Jesus] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in [Jesus], were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,<sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his [the Holy Spirit's] glory.**

To be **“sealed”** with the Holy Spirit means that we were marked, tagged, identified by God as his firstborn sons. Indeed, in your Baptism you were marked

as a son of God, and nothing can take that away from you. You belong to him forever.

Here, again, we find the promise of **“inheritance.”** Three times in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit we have been promised an **“inheritance.”** This means God loves you so much that he has given you everything you need from now unto eternity. He wants you to receive this promise with a sense of confidence. He wants you to know that everything he has belongs to you.

In Hungary, there were two brothers. Their names were Zsolt and Geza Peladi. They were so poor they lived in a cave, and they sold scrap they found on the streets for pennies. One day an attorney found them on the streets of Budapest rummaging for food. He informed them of an inheritance bequeathed to them by their maternal grandmother. One of the brothers said, "We knew our mother came from a wealthy family but she was a difficult person and had severed ties with them, and then later abandoned us. We lost touch with her and our father until they died." The brothers' inheritance was 7-billion dollars!

Likewise we were once estranged from God because of sin and rebellion. But Jesus died for us anyway, and God gave us an inheritance in Heaven.

Many people think that IF they get into Heaven, it will only be by the skin of their teeth. Friends in Christ, you're ALL IN! Your inheritance in heaven is so great it cannot be measured. Your inheritance in heaven should make you feel like a homeless person who has just received the news he's inherited 7-billion dollars! There is nothing you cannot do!

Brothers and sisters, our inheritance includes the forgiveness of sins, thus we may live our lives with no fear of death. Our inheritance includes the Holy Spirit. So we may live with confidence, knowing in our minds and in our hearts that the Lord will guide our every step. Our inheritance includes peace of mind and joy in our hearts, so we may live day by day fearlessly. Our inheritance includes the promise of angels who watch over us. Our inheritance includes God's promise to answer our prayers **“that our joy may be complete” (John 15:11)!**

Someone once said, "What we do for ourselves dies with us. But what we do for others and the world remains and is immortal." When a person receives a significant inheritance, they can squander the legacy they have received, or they can build on it. With the inheritance God has given to us, what kind of legacy will we leave?

Friends in Christ, this week let us consider the depth and breadth of our Lord's work in our hearts and in our spirits, and let us give thanks for it.

This week let us begin to build a legacy with the inheritance we have received as sons of God, asking ourselves what can I do with the joy in my heart, my peace of mind, the fearlessness with which I live to be a blessing to the people around me.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this good news with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.