



# Your Savior is Born

## Titus 2:11-14

Presents, wrapping paper, empty boxes thrown to the side take over the space we call home. Many awaken in the morning anxious to surround the tree and open presents, as if this were the reason for the celebration. As one Christmas card I received proclaimed, “have a merry Christmas, but don’t forget the one whose birthday it is!” It is very easy to leave Jesus out of our festivities. He is the reason for celebrating, but too easily we ignore him, without neglecting to tell others they should recognize the fact that the whole celebration exists because of God becoming flesh and living in our midst.

It is interesting that Paul speaks of anticipation regarding the manifesting of Jesus Christ. Jesus was already the fulfillment so long-awaited and anticipated. He was the hope of Israel over centuries. From early childhood, we know that angels and shepherds in Luke 2 announced Jesus as the awaited Messiah, the salvation of his people. Simeon and Anna in the temple had spoken of the same. They had already seen the salvation of Israel! How, then, can Paul speak of anticipating Jesus’ being manifested? He had already been born. He had already died on the cross. He had risen. What else was there?

Of course, his birth was a motif of happiness and salvation, but that still in a sense of anticipation. He was already the salvation of Israel, as well as our own. What was lacking was precisely what Paul mentions in his letter to Titus. He still needed to be revealed fully as the savior the already was. His manifestation was what was still lacking. It was not lacking for him. It was simply lacking for people like Paul and ourselves.

There in the manger, the grace of God was already present. God had already planned to deal with all through grace motivated by love. His salvation had already there been granted to us. Jesus was already Savior, the Messiah, the King of the universe who came to offer us communion and reconciliation. Nothing more was necessary to rescue us from sin from God’s perspective. What was lacking was for God to clarify for us what he had done—that God would manifest the details of His plan of love and grace, such that we might trust and accept such a glorious gift of reconciliation with God. There was likewise a need to declare the motive and purpose of such a salvation—a change in our lives, attitudes, and actions.

The angel in Luke announces the arriving of the Savior. Years after his death and resurrection, Paul speaks of anticipation of the manifestation of this same Savior. In the manger we cannot quite see the whole story. We cannot appreciate the character of this life in Christ with is announced by the angels. We do not comprehend there the love and grace of God that would take Him to the cross. One cannot yet distinguish this child for the character of love for the defenseless, isolated, and rejected by society and the religious. One can not yet see the good news of God’s salvation in His grace and love toward us sinners. There is yet a long path to walk to make all this manifest to us. At the same time, one can already say that in that manger all our salvation is already present, even if the divine plan is yet to be revealed more fully.

The Sermon on the Mount is still in the sights; the cross is still coming; the resurrection is still ahead, but our salvation is already born. The divine plan is already in operation. The fact of God’s grace and love has already occasioned his birth, offering reconciliation to all who will accept Him. It was still needful to reveal or manifest to the world the reality and character of this divine plan.

What Jesus spent years revealing was the character of the life God expects of us, as well as the character of the God who demands of us. He manifested that love is the essential attribute of God in offering us grace and reconciliation. He revealed that God is like the good father who seeks the best for his children. He revealed that the character of our lives should be different because of having experienced God's grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love. In the Sermon on the Mount, he painted a canvas of the character of this life. He illustrated that love requires much more than any law. At the same time, he illustrated that the grace of love extends where law cannot reach.

In the cross he revealed the greatness and depth of God's love, with forgiveness for our sins. He gave himself in order to rescue us, doing everything necessary so that the only thing left for us to do is a simple acceptance of what he did for our reconciliation. He gave his own life to reveal the full extent of his love and grace.

In the resurrection, he manifested the reality behind His words and deeds, as well as the effectiveness of his offering Himself for us. He demonstrated for the disciples that He truly was God made flesh to invite us to a new life based on God's grace.

Already, God had done everything, but Paul still anticipated His manifestation. Such anticipation contained two parts: ours and God's. It was not that there was something else God needed to do in order to bring about our salvation. It was that there was still another step in manifesting the reality of His plan by declaring in an incontrovertible way the fact of the identity of Jesus Christ. Paul still awaited the day in which the glory of God in Christ Jesus would be made manifest in finality. The reality was already in action. Jesus was God. Salvation was already effective. Others still needed to understand it.

Our part was and is more burdensome. There was still a need for us to live according to the character of God revealed in Jesus Christ. There was still a need for us to be transformed from within in order to live according to the love and forgiveness received. God still needed to be manifested in us in accord with the full character of God revealed in Christ Jesus.

God was revealed in Jesus Christ. He was manifest in the manger and by the angels around Bethlehem. He was manifest in Jesus' ministry through word and deed. He was manifest in the cross and resurrection. Now He anticipated being manifest in our lives. Yes, with Paul, we anticipate the day of His return in glory, but meanwhile, we need to occupy ourselves in revealing His presence in the manner of our relating one with another. We declare Jesus present and offering salvation in the measure that our own lives reflect His love, grace, peace, and forgiveness. We are the principle form in which Jesus is revealed today as Savior and Lord.

For Paul, as for the gospel and letters of John, the arrival and salvation in Jesus Christ begin in the love of God. They being in love, for all depends on grace which cannot operate without love for all. It is not the wrath of God that designed questions of salvation and eternity. It is the love and grace of God that operates and operated so that Jesus came to offer new life in purity and communion with God for eternity.

We say that the Savior was born there in the manger. We declare he came to rescue us. Are we declaring his coming and presence through our manner of living? There is not much to gain in declaring his birth, if His life is not manifest in the character of our own living.

—*Christopher B. Harbin*