

The season of Christmas is upon us — yes, there are 12 days of Christmas – it is the time between Christmas, December 25 and Epiphany, January six.

A lot of things happen in the days after Christmas. In some countries, that celebrate Boxing Day, which is December 26, one of the traditions is that Alms collected throughout Advent are distributed to the poor and needy. Other traditions including returning gifts that were the wrong size or color, or that were useless and taking advantage of the after Christmas sales.

Another tradition is redeeming those gift cards that are in great demand these days. The Genuardi's supermarket near us has a whole end cap of gift cards for literally hundreds of stores – Home Depot, Bed Bath and Beyond, Best Buy and so forth.

These cards, which vary in value are then redeemed for whatever the recipient wants or needs. The ironic part about gift cards, is that, for the most part, individuals still need to go to the store to redeem them – this time, not return something, but to redeem them.

We are the pinnacle of God's creation – remember, it is said of only mankind that we were created in the image of God – and we had a great need. That need was for someone to redeem us ... to redeem us from the curse of the law and to provide forgiveness of our sins.

And that is exactly what we celebrate at Christmas – we celebrate the birth of one who came to redeem us – to pay the price for our sins. As we read in Galatians 4:4-5: *“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”*

Turn with me to our Gospel lesson for this morning from Matthew, chapter 1. And we read in part: Matthew 1:18-21: *“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”*

*... for He will save His people from their sins.* This is the reason for Christmas. When Adam sinned, one of the consequences is that all who followed him – every single person, with the exception of the Lord Jesus Christ, is born a sinner, and therefore open to the wrath of God.

In the Old Testament, God ordained a series of sacrifices so that people could have forgiveness of their sins. But we know as we compare Scripture with Scripture, that all the Old Testament sacrifices looked forward to the one final and perfect sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross at Calvary.

As we read in Hebrews 10:1-4: *“For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.”*

The Old Testament sacrifices were a shadow of what would come in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, the reason to celebrate his birth.

As we know, the joyous celebration of Christmas, gives way then to the somber season of Lent, the events of Holy week, culminating in the death of our Savior for our sins – followed then – most importantly by his glorious resurrection ... *for He will save His people from their sins.*

We had a debt that we could not pay and so Jesus paid the price – he redeemed those who have faith and trust in him from our sins. In short, we have the salvation of our souls and all the other blessings of our salvation. Not only do we have forgiveness of our sins, but we then have the added privileges of prayer, access to God and a place reserved in heaven for us.

But there is one other very important blessing that gives added meaning, if you will, to what we celebrate. Again, we read in Galatians 4:4-5: *“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”*

The beauty of our Lectionary – this is part of our Epistle lesson for today — and it is intimately connected to our Gospel lesson. Our gospel lesson tells us that Jesus came to save his people from their sins.

And part of that salvation is that we have been adopted into the family of God. Again, that passage from Galatians is important to repeat – Galatians 4:1-7: *“Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”*

Think about those words – for those of us who have the salvation of our souls we have gone from those who were in bondage to the elements of the world — other scriptures, call it being a slave to sin — to those who are sons of God and heirs to all the blessings of being part of God’s family and able to call Him “Our Father.”

The Apostle Paul put it this way, in his letter to the Ephesian Christians, and consequently to us – Ephesians 2:17-20: “*And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,*”

My friends, it really does not get any better than that. Taken all together we see that we have peace with God – we are no longer at war with him — we are part of His family – we are *fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God* ... we have the privilege of calling God “Father” and the multitude of other blessings of our salvation. Is it any wonder that the Scriptures tell us that we should neglect so great a salvation.

Again, all because of what we are celebrating at this joyous season ... *for He will save His people from their sins*. So, as we think of Christmas, let us never forget what it really means to us.