

GOD LOVES YOU DEARLY AND HAS LOVED YOU FROM ALL ETERNITY!
Sermon for the 2nd Sunday after Christmas, 2026
Ephesians 1:3-14

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Second Reading read before, Ephesians 1:3-14: ³ **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,** ⁴ **even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love** ⁵ **He predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will,** ⁶ **to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved.** ⁷ **In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace,** ⁸ **which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight** ⁹ **making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ** ¹⁰ **as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.**

¹¹ **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,** ¹² **so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory.** ¹³ **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,** ¹⁴ **who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Have you ever stopped to think just how much God loves you? Do you recall the words from Jeremiah 31? *“I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you”* (31:3). *“I have loved you with an everlasting love.”* That’s precious. In eternity, God has chosen you, freely and for no other reason *than His love for you.* People can be loveless, but God is love (1 John 4:8).

Such powerful love *defies explanation.* It chooses and makes its own the object of its choice so that no force in heaven or on earth can empty that choice of its power. *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”* Paul asks (Romans 8:35), and then answers, *“I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,* ³⁹ *nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”* 8:38). Here is the certainty upon which our salvation, our life, and our hope rest.

Friends, I want you to know that *God loves each one of you dearly.* The Father loves you so much that He sent His only-begotten Son, born of the Virgin Mary, to be your Saviour. That’s what the Christmas Season is all about — reminding us of that. Jesus loves you so much that He willingly shed His blood for you so that your sins may be paid for and you would receive forgiveness of those sins and life eternal through faith in Him. The Holy Spirit loves you so much that He comes to you and works through the waters of Baptism and the Word of God to change you from an enemy of God into a lover and disciple of the only God, the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, St. Paul wrote the words of our sermon text this morning, to assure hearts that may be troubled and to show the extraordinary wisdom and grace of our God. Through these words, Paul teaches us that God loves us dearly and has loved us from all eternity!

He begins with the words, **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has**

blest us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will.”

Consider how dearly we are loved by God. St. Paul tells us that the heavenly Father **“has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing.”**

Luther’s Small Catechism reminds us of all the blessings God gives. In the explanation of the First Article of the Apostle’s Creed, Luther writes, *“I believe that God has made me and all creatures.”* Then he lists some blessings we receive. God has given us our *“body and soul, eyes, ears, all my members, my reason and strength. He gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, a house and home, a wife and children, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil...”* All these blessings are wonderful, but the greatest blessing we have received is that God has loved us so much that He sent His only-begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him as their Saviour will receive eternal life. Eternal life — what a blessing! We all picture in our minds what eternal life must be like, but let me tell you that what you picture in your mind *does not even come close to what eternal life is like.* Our feeble minds cannot comprehend what awaits us in eternity.

That day hasn’t arrived for us yet, and so, as we await, we must understand that we all need forgiveness for our sins because, daily, we sin much and live in open rebellion toward God. Think about it: are there any among you today who can truly say that you have never thought an unkind thing, never said an unkind word, and have always acted in ways that were pleasing to God? Do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?¹ Do you grumble and complain without taking the time to understand other people’s thinking? Even in this season of Christmas, we struggle with selfishness. We are much more willing to be the recipients of gifts than to be the givers. Our *tempers* are expressed more than we like when holiday guests disrupt our routines or when celebration situations stress us out. In short, our sinful self is always ready to show itself in our actions, thoughts, and words. The awful reality is that we all have fallen short of the glory of God and earn with our sins the wages of death.

And the death that I’m talking about is not only physical but, more importantly, also eternal. Every one of us must confess that we have not obeyed the commandments of God perfectly and stand in need of forgiveness. We all must understand that we cannot earn our way to heaven. We simply cannot do enough good works to cover over our many sins. In fact, if we try to earn our salvation by way of God’s Law, we must obey it perfectly, and not one of us has done that. What are we to do? Who will save us?

The joyous message from Paul today is that God, before the creation of the world, before *our* creation, carefully considered how to save us, and He determined that we would be saved in His Son, Jesus Christ. Paul writes that in Jesus **“we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, ⁸ which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.”**

Paul uses *two terms* that differ as to the picture underlying them, yet are virtually interchangeable in meaning: **“redemption”** and **“forgiveness.”** Redemption implies that someone is a slave or captive

¹ Matthew 7:3.

and *needs to be ransomed*. Forgiveness implies that someone has acted improperly toward another and, in so doing, *has incurred guilt that needs to be covered over or taken away*.

Both require a heavy price. The sinner has offended God Himself; the price is—or at least should be—the sinner’s life. “*The wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23). But “**according to the riches of His grace, ⁸ which He lavished upon us,**” the unthinkable has occurred: God Himself paid the price. He has sent His Son to be our Substitute, to suffer and die in our place. Through His blood, we have been rescued from the captivity of sin and freed from its guilt.

There is no way we would have devised such a plan. Instead, God has created it “**according to the riches of His grace, ⁸ which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.**”

Not only would we not have thought up a plan like this, but we would never have grasped or understood it if God had not made “**known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ.**” The “mystery” of God’s will is almost synonymous with God’s plan of salvation, that is, *His will to save sinners*. God’s plan is not mysterious in the sense that it mystifies people or is incomprehensible to them. It is a mystery only in the sense that people cannot understand it on their own. God has to explain it to them and lead them to know it and accept it. And that he does, of course, in the Gospel that proclaims His grace in Christ. We are indeed children of the heavenly Father. We are heirs of God’s kingdom!

And please note that this is not simply a general proclamation of God’s grace, but *also a personal one*. God loves *you*. He calls *you* by name. His plan of salvation is for *you* personally, even as it is for all the elect of God. Rejoice in how dearly God loves you!

Jesus, who is God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, loves you so dearly that He humbled Himself and willingly became a man. He was born of the Virgin Mary. Thus, Jesus was born *without* sin. As a man, Jesus lived perfectly under the Law of God so that He might obey it, as you and I have not. Jesus loves you and me so dearly that He willingly shouldered our sins, in fact, the sins of the whole lot of mankind and carried them to the cross of Calvary. Upon the cross, in obedience to the Law of God, *Jesus died*. God says that the wages of sin are death, and the soul that sins shall surely die. To fulfil the Law of God, Jesus allowed Himself to be hung on that cross. Jesus died on the cross so that He might redeem us with His blood shed and His body broken. Jesus once and for all time paid the price of your sins, my sins, and the whole of mankind’s sins. Jesus didn’t remain in the grave but rose again on the third day victorious over sin, Satan, and death. He thereby assures us that all has been completed on behalf of our salvation. Paul reminds us that this plan of salvation was in place even “**before the foundation of the world.**”

Jesus and the Father send the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, to work through the Word and Sacraments to call unbelievers into true faith and to sustain them in it. God desires that all people be brought into saving faith. We know this is His will from so many passages that point it out. For example: “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16). “*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people*” (Titus 2:11). “*This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Tim. 2:3–4). And, “*He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world*” (1 John 2:2).

Furthermore, St. Paul reminds us that not only has the Holy Spirit called each of us to faith, *but His presence in our hearts serves yet another purpose*.

Having “**heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and (believing) in Him,**” Paul says, you “**were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.**” We bear a seal, having the Holy Spirit in our hearts. In ancient times, a seal was the sign of ownership. For us to bear the seal of the Holy Spirit

indicates that we belong to God. That is a present blessing granted at our baptism.

But Paul points to yet another blessing coming from the Spirit's presence in our hearts by faith. We have assurance for the future. The apostle describes the Spirit as "**the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.**"

The fact that God has given His Holy Spirit into our hearts by faith at the present time *is an assurance that the rest of God's promise will also be forthcoming*. He guarantees that He'll hold our inheritance in heaven for us "**until we acquire possession of it.**" A parallel passage that speaks of the Holy Spirit, both as a seal indicating God's present ownership of the believer and as the guarantee of future blessings with God in heaven is written in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, where Paul writes, "*And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put His seal on us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.*"

Dear friends, when we realise we have fallen and sinned against God's holy will, the same Holy Spirit enables us to repent of our sin and to strive once again to walk in accordance with God's will. See how much God loves us dearly! He doesn't leave us without a guarantee of our salvation. The Holy Spirit is the guarantor of our eternal inheritance. He is the one who leads us to true faith and enables us to receive the wonderful blessings of God, blessings which God determined to give us "**before the foundation of the world.**"

Dear Christian, God indeed loves you dearly! Enter this New Year confidently believing this. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.