

# St. Peter Lutheran Church - Modesto, CA

✠ First Sunday after Christmas ✠

December 30, 2007

*Sermon by Pastor Johann Caauwe*

**I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us— yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses.**

<sup>8</sup> He said, “Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me”; and so he became their Savior.

<sup>9</sup> In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

Isaiah 63:7-9

You could probably make the case that Christmas brings out the kindness in people. At no other time of the year do people give more gifts to others, or send warmer greetings to each other. The end of the year is prime time for giving to charities or helping out the needy. Even people who are considered real Scrooges the rest of the year will usually make some show of kindness at Christmas. Even those who really aren't even celebrating Christmas (as such), will still join in the spirit of the season and show kindness.

Of course, some of us might have a hunch that at least some of this kindness is just a facade, and it's just temporary. We suspect that for many people buying and giving gifts is simply a tradition. Many gifts are given because they are expected to be given. Charitable contributions are often given as close as possible to the end of tax year. All of these nice things we do during the holidays, sometimes are done simply because, “'Tis the season” But come January, it's all over and back to normal.

Our loving and gracious God needs no season to prompt his kindness to humankind. God is eternal and unchanging. In season and out of season, as long as one year turns to another, God always remains the same perfectly loving God that he always is. But you and I live in time. We mark that time by days and weeks and years. And at Christmas time we remember that at a specific time and date, the eternal God broke into human history and showed his kindness in the most amazing way: He took on human flesh and became born of a woman.

So in one sense, God the Father's kindness to us is not unique to this season or celebration. But we also see how at Christmas, God the Father poured out his kindness upon us. So this morning we want to look at the **Father's Christmas kindness**. In his kindness, God called us his sons and daughters. And because of it, he treats us as his children.

In this section of the book of Isaiah, the prophet breaks out in praise and prayer to God:

**“I will tell of the kindnesses of the Lord, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the Lord has done for us—yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses.”**

Isaiah praises God in the same way that believers always give praise to God. They praise God by talking about what God has done for them. **“I will tell of his...deeds.”** The things he has done. In fact, that is how God shows kindness to his people—through his deeds.

Throughout the Bible, and especially in the Old Testament when people are praising God for his mighty deeds, they are usually thinking of one thing in particular. They didn't have Christmas or Easter to think back to—those marvelous acts of God to save us. The Israelites thought about the Exodus. That was God's great deed of kindness to them. They thought back to that time when God powerfully brought the nation of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, through the wilderness and into the promised land of Canaan. That is probably the most repeated Bible story in all the Bible. And that is what Isaiah is referring to here. God acted to save his people from slavery in Egypt.

And **“He said, “Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me”: and so he became their Savior.”** God called the people of Israel his sons, which is surprising because these sons were not the faithful sons God was looking for. After he brought them out of Egypt God gave to the people his law, his written will for them. And they said in response, **“We will do everything the Lord has said.”** They made a covenant with God on Mt. Sinai. They promised to worship the Lord their God and serve him only. They promised to love their neighbors. But they lied. They broke their word. They failed to keep their promise. They worshipped other Gods. They misused God's name. They ignored his Word. They failed to show love to the people all around them. Israel was a son that should have been disowned. Even God knew that. He knew what he should do to them. He should wipe them off the face of the earth. He should have destroyed them completely. He should have cut them off from all of his Fatherly kindness. He should have done to them what he should do to all of us who have been false to him. He should kick us out of the family and send us packing.

But instead, **“He said, ‘Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me’: so he became their Savior.”** How can he do that? How can he call us his children even though we are not what his children should be? He doesn't want children like us! And yet he calls us his children just as he called Israel his son.

That is (in part) what the Evangelist Matthew is referring to in the Gospel for today. When St. Matthew records the account of Jesus returning safely from Egypt with Mary and Joseph, he says that is fulfilling the words of the prophet Hosea who wrote, **“Out of Egypt I called my son.”** Hosea was talking about the Exodus. The whole verse says, **“When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.”**

God gives the name “Son” to both that poorly behaved little kid called Israel and to his perfect, only-begotten Son Jesus. It is as though God sees no difference between the two. Through his Son, God sees them, and us in the same way. When he looks at us, he sees his Son. And so he calls us his Son—his sons and daughters. Not because that's the way we are, but because that is the way Jesus was.

That's the Father's kindness at Christmas. The Father sent us his only Son so that he could call us by the same name.

Of course, God doesn't just call us his children, but because we are his children, he treats us as his children as well. **“In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.”**

If you were to read through the first books of the Bible, especially Exodus, you would get to read how God did exactly this for his children. You would hear about how God was troubled when trouble came upon them—even when it was their own fault and when they were living with the consequences of their sins. You see how God is like a father who really hurts when his children suffer or when he has to discipline his children.

You would see how God redeemed Israel. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt. God paid the price to set them free. They paid nothing; the Father paid the price for them—just like parents who go to great expense to raise children.

And then when they travelled through the wilderness God says **“I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.”** God carried them like the Dad who picks up a weary toddler near the end of a long walk because his little legs just won’t make it.

Basically, God does everything for them. He knew their distress. He paid the price. He carried them. He showed them the kindness of a father. It’s no wonder then, that we read in the lesson today:

**“When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law.** Jesus Christ became truly human so that God himself would be just like us, so that he would know the demands of the law, so that he would know Satan’s pressure to disregard it, so that he would know what life is like in a sinful world, even though he had none. He came at Christmas to know and experience our distress.

**God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law.** The price to free a slave of sin is a perfect life and an innocent death. We could contribute neither. Jesus Christ paid both. He came at Christmas to redeem us.

**God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.** Those who are truly children receive all the benefits of living in the household and being in the family. And they know that they belong there. They know that the Father will never abandon them or forget them. The Father knows that his children cannot make it on their own, so he picks them up in his arms and carries them. He came at Christmas to secure our place in the Father’s arms.

That is the Father’s kindness at Christmas. It’s not given with compulsion. He doesn’t give it, secretly wishing that he hadn’t started this tradition in the first place. The Father’s kindness is as genuine and real as the baby in the manger. And most amazingly, the Father’s Christmas kindness does not need to be packed away with the ornaments and the lights. The Father’s kindness extends to all who are reminded of these things. Now certainly we do that more than ever here in the Christmas season. But this Christmas kindness extends throughout the year whenever we **“tell of the kindnesses of the Lord.”** Whenever we speak to one another about the good things he has done for us—that’s pretty much the heart and core of our worship services; whenever we share with another individual the truth that God has made us his children (though we did not deserve it) and that he treats us as his children and saves us without any help from us; We are carrying God’s kindness to them.

Ultimately, that is really what all Christmas kindness is all about. Whether it is with our words or our actions, or with our gifts—may they always tell of the kindness of our heavenly Father, yes, the many good things he has done for us, his children. Amen.