



ALL!

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on Christmas Eve 1994:
Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

"*All*"- one of the most common words in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. "*All*"- it's used 6- 7000 times in the Old Testament, almost as many times as the word "Lord". It's used another 1228 times in the New Testament. It's a very common word. That word, that little word, that little three letter word is one of the most important words in the Bible. It's one of the most wonderful words. *All*

Kay, the boys and I spent this past Thanksgiving with all of Kay's immediate family. Her brother, his wife and their seven month old son were there. Her sister Lucy's three children. Her sister Ann, her husband David and their two children, Joanna and Daniel. And Kay's mother and father were there. Kay's father, the patriarch of the family, knew he was terminally ill - cancer! He knew that, short of a miracle, he wouldn't live to Christmas. So after Thanksgiving Dinner Mr. Ziegler called all of us into the family room.

"I want all of you in here. *All* of you!" It's sometimes very difficult to get little children all in one place and quiet at one time. And then with more sternness Kay's father commanded, "I want all of you here, now! *All* of you." And with some effort we all gathered in one room.

Kay's father said, "This might be the last time we're *all* together in this life. This might be the last time I can tell *all* of you how much you mean to mean. I love *all* of you very, very much. I'm so proud of *all* of you."

He gave a brief testimony. He said, "The Lord Jesus Christ has been faithful to me throughout my life. There's nothing in the world that could make me happier than for *all* of your^{to} trust in Jesus and follow him *all* your lives."

And then he said, "I want to give all of you my blessing." He slowly stood up and painfully walked, first, to Andrew, his oldest grandchild. He placed his two large hands on Andrew and told him how much he loved him and how proud he was of him. He prayed that he'd have a living faith in Christ all his life. He then went to Philip and placed his hands on him, and then to Mark, and around the room to all the grandchildren. Then to his son and his wife and his daughters and their husbands. He gave his blessing to *all* of us. *AMM*

That's what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. God the Father arose from his throne in heaven. He humbled himself and came down to earth. He clothed himself in our flesh. He came to us in Jesus Christ.

Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:
preaching good news to the poor
and release to the captives,
teaching by word and deed
and blessing the children,
healing the sick
and binding up the brokenhearted,
eating with outcasts,
forgiving sinners,
and calling all - *all* - to repent and believe the gospel."

He summons us all, "I want all of you in my kingdom, ALL. I WANT TO BLESS ALL OF YOU.
In the birth of Jesus the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all. *AMM*

He still comes to us. In the preaching of the Gospel He comes to us. In the Sacraments He comes to us. In so many other ways, He comes to you and to you and to you and to me - to *all* of us. He places his strong, loving hands on us. He

blesses us.

If this is true then good news^{is} is for you and me - for *all*. You can say, "I am one of those for whom Christ gave himself to redeem from *all* iniquity." "I am one of those summoned to sing to the Lord a new song." "No matter how great my ^{maybe} grief and sadness, I am one who has been called to rejoice in God's promise." No matter how deep^{the} darkness in which I walk, God's great light has shined on me in the birth of Jesus Christ." "No matter who I am or what I've done or have failed to do or believe, I am one of those to whom the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation."

The good news is for *all*. It's for those of you who are near to God and it's for those of you who have wandered far, far away. ^{without a doubt some of you here?} You've ^{name to God + his people,} wandered far away and you can't find your way back! Without a doubt there are people here tonight who *do not believe* that God has come to us in Jesus Christ. There are people who are *can't believe* that Christ gave himself to free you from all iniquity. There are people who have excluded yourselves from those whom God includes in his Christmas Good News.

One thing I plead with you *not* do on this wonderful evening - I plead with you - don't exclude yourself from this good news for all! Don't exclude yourself whom God includes! I plead with you - don't allow yourself to say, "This good news of Christ's birth is not and can not be for me. The Good News can't be for me because I can't believe. The Good News can't be for me because of what I've done. It cannot be for me because of who I am." You dare not say this kind of thing

because "the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to *all*."

And I plead with you not to say that "there's some iniquity, some sin, some failure in my life from which Jesus Christ is unable to redeem me." Do not say such a thing because "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, gave himself for us to redeem us from *all* iniquity." *All* Not just *some* iniquity. Not just the iniquity I can overcome by myself. But all iniquity - especially ~~the~~ iniquity over which I have no power. *All*

How I yearn to be set free from *all* iniquity. Iniquity - that which hurts my loved ones and neighbors and enemies. That which leads nation to take up sword against nation. That which hurts God, ignores God, suppresses God's truth, turns and rejects God, and opposes. ^{Red in Christ} God came to redeem us from all iniquity.

One other thing I plead with you not to do. I plead with you not to exclude your neighbor. ^{FROM GOD'S GRACE} Do not say of a neighbor or of an enemy, "That person is too wicked. That person's life style excludes them. The ^{is} person is so evil that God can not redeem them." We dare not exclude that person - we dare not exclude any person - because in Jesus Christ, "the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all"

Joy - Christmas joy is born when we include ourselves and all others among those whom God has included. Joy is born when we respond to God's Christmas call to all and sing to the Lord a new song, bless his name and tell of his salvation from day to day.

Let us pray: Good and gracious God, on this holy night you gave us your Son, the Lord of the universe wrapped in swaddling clothes, the Savior of all lying in a manger. On this holy night draw us into the mystery of your love. Join our voices with the heavenly host that we may sing your glory on high. Give us a place among the shepherds that we may find the one for whom we have waited, Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.