

## **Romans 15:4-13 The Christ-Child Brings us True Unity! Advent 2 December 4, 2016**

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Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and from our Advent Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

God's Advent Word to prepare us and many others for Christmas is written in Romans 15:4-13

These are Your words heavenly Father. Unite us in Christ our Savior by Your Word. Your Word is truth.

Dear Christian friends,

The Advent season is a time to joyfully prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth. Even though on the news we've heard of destructive fires in Tennessee and In Oakland, an attack at an Ohio campus, and other sad stories, we have the news of Christ to bring us true joy. Many people in our country don't know the truth about Jesus. For them at best, Christmas will bring temporary happiness. Advent is a wonderful time for us to reach people with the news of Jesus. But, we get so busy this time of year with plans and activities it's hard for us to focus on the true meaning of Advent and Christmas. Through His Word God reminds us to have unity of mind in Jesus as we work toward the same goals: to encourage each other in the faith and to reach the lost with the Good news of Christ before He returns.

### **The Christ-child Brings Us True Unity!**

**First, our unity in Christ will help us work together.** Paul wrote, *"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."* (v. 5-6) Everyone in this church is alike and yet different. We're alike in that we are all sinners who deserve death and eternal judgment. Yet, we have received Jesus' forgiveness by faith so that we will not die in our sins but have eternal life together. Yet, we are all different at the same time. We are originally from various places of the world. Without Christ many of us would never have known each other nor have anything in common. But, we have Christ as our Savior and we have His Word to teach and guide us so that we may grow in unity of faith and in the confession of the truth. Christ unites us as one so that with our different backgrounds we may work together as God's people!

We all need this encouragement. We're still sinners who need daily forgiveness and who need to daily forgive others. Paul wrote that we can learn from the Old Testament. I think of the lesson of Joseph. His brothers rejected him and sold him as a slave bound for Egypt. Later God raised Joseph to a great position of authority where his own brothers were bowing before him pleading for food during a famine. Joseph could have so easily throw them in jail or made them slaves. But, he forgave them. He realized that God had been working for good despite their intentions. The brothers gladly received his help. We are people who sin against God and against each other. We need to see that God has forgiven us by the power of the Gospel in Christ and that we can forgive others by that same power. We are all living testaments to the love of God as we show our love for each other. Remembering the Christ-child, may we always live by His love to the glory of God!

**Second, our unity in Christ reaches out to others.** Paul quoted Psalm 18 in our verses: *"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name."* (v.9) Specific promises about Jesus were first made to the Jews, to Abraham and his descendents. But, Paul describes through David how non-Jews were included in God's plan of salvation! Millions of people around our country are serving false gods that cannot save them. And we have a Savior who gave His life for all those people. This time of year we have an opportunity to tell them the true meaning of Christmas in word and even through familiar Christmas songs!

This is the good news: God's Son knew that due to sin we could do nothing to make ourselves right with God. So, out of love He took on our human nature and was born as a baby to save us. *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."* (John 1:14) We want all people to know that our hope is in Jesus to save them! Just as God kept His promise to send Jesus as one of us, He will keep His promise to bless our faith in Him! Paul wrote, *"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 1:6) Jesus took away all sin by His death and He freely offers to all the righteousness of His holy life. This time of year it gets dark by late afternoon. But, I think of how so many areas that would be usually dark have been transformed by bright Christmas lights. Those lights should remind us that the brightness of Christ's holy life completely drives away the darkness of our sins. It is in Christ's salvation which we rejoice and we want all people to be joyful with us. Too many people are still missing out.

This time of year much attention is given to people who need food or to children who need toys. It's a good thing to help them! But what is being done for those people in our area who have no faith in Jesus? Some are trying to save themselves and don't know what the birth of Christ means. Others in their worldly wisdom think that the story of Christmas is a fairy tale. Other people are living only for selfish pleasures and evil desires. These people will not be satisfied this Christmas.

**Third our unity in Christ fills us with spiritual blessings.** Paul wrote, *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."* (v.13) We would be no different than any unbeliever had it not been for the Holy Spirit working through the Word of Christ to give us saving faith. The more we keep hearing God's Word and apply it to our lives, the more our Christmas season will be joyful and may cause others to ask about the hope we have.

Hearing God's Word, believing, and having joy are often connected in the Bible. Luke wrote in Acts 8 about non-Jewish people who heard about Jesus for the first time. What was their response? *"The multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip.... And there was great joy in that city."* (Acts 8:6, 8) Paul wrote earlier in our verses, *"Whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."* (Romans 15:4) The hope Paul mentions is a Christian hope. It is a certainty in Christ. We trust in Him to provide for our daily physical and spiritual needs. And, we look to Him for an even better future in heaven! God will not disappoint us.

In our world, over the centuries nations have come and gone. Eventually, this whole world will be burned up on Judgment Day. But, the Word of our God stands forever! We trust God's promises that He will keep us strong in Christ. The Christian Church has withstood many attacks for over 2000 years. Not even the powers of hell have prevailed against it. That Word of God has been given to us this Advent to give us hope. His Word is in our church and in our homes so that we might daily be refreshed together in Christ. Jesus is our faithful Savior. In His mercy and grace He has brought His Word to us and by faith we have the certain hope of life with Him in heaven.

The coming of Christmas this year won't change the world's problems. We'll keep hearing news about fires, attacks, and other sad stories. We'll also have challenges to our personal faith in Christ. But, the Advent truths of the Christ-child will strengthen our faith and our God, who so freely blesses us, will be honored! Jesus has changed us through His Word to give us a lasting confidence in Him. Rejoice in the Lord and proclaim His saving name! Amen.