



Thursday

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Ephesians 1:3-14

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹²so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

The Second Sunday of Christmas – Isn't that a delightful title? Rather than rushing through Christmas Day, the Lectionary order has the prelude with Advent, then Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and then two Sundays after Christmas designated as Christmas Sundays. I love it. I love the seasons of the church calendar. I love the flow...the relaxed rhythm contrasted to a chaotic world.

Coming from a Baptist background, I don't recall following a church calendar. Sermons were 35-45 minutes long Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, and Wednesday nights, usually focusing on a specific topic or book of the Bible to study in depth. I remember attending one such church service on a Palm Sunday. There were no palms, no reading of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, no hosannas – just a long sermon on a topic I've long forgotten. But I do remember being so disappointed as I left. What were we going to hear on Easter?

Since embracing Lutheranism, I have found such joy in the flow of the church calendar seasons, especially in the preparation for Advent and Sundays after. It's such a blessing to continue celebrating God's gift to us! And that gift just keeps giving! In John 1:16 "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." Grace is undeserved love and mercy and according to that verse, love and mercy are just being piled upon ALL of us! Ephesians goes on to remind us of more gifts – "blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" and also "the seal of the promised Holy Spirit". Because of the Word being made flesh, made incarnate, we have been declared HIS adopted children.

That gives me HOPE. I can take my worries and troubles to Abba, my heavenly Father. It certainly doesn't mean I'm not going to have struggles and disappointments. But Immanuel, God with us, is right there with ME, sharing my burdens, helping me work through them.

Alleluia!! Let's keep celebrating Christmas through the New Year!