

## ***Christmas Day Sermon 1 by Bishop Michael Hawkins***

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By the Right Reverend Michael W. Hawkins

Bishop of Saskatchewan

The kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared. (Titus 3.4)

Today is the Nativity of our Lord, or the Birth-Day of Christ, commonly called Christmas Day. Throughout the world over the next two weeks, millions of Christians will celebrate the birth of Jesus. You know, on our birthdays we receive gifts, but on Jesus' birthday everyone else gets gifts. That seems most fitting to me, for Christ came into the world not to receive, but to give. This is the biggest birthday of the year...and there is more to it. Really, today we celebrate three birthdays! Let me tell you about the three birthdays we celebrate today.

The first birthday is Christ's birth for us. What does God think of you, and what does he feel for you? What greater proof could there be? What more final, complete and convincing act could there be, than for our God to come and take on our

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humanity, flesh and blood, and live and die as one of us, for all of us? Look and see, behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us. In that text from the letter to Titus, Paul writes, “In Jesus, the goodness and loving kindness,” - literally the philanthropy, the love of humanity, the humanness, the humanity - of God our Saviour has appeared.”

This was spoken of second-hand, but now it appears for all to see. The Creator of the world came into the world and was not recognized. The King of Israel was not received. For he can only be known and received by faith. The Creator becomes a creature, the Word becomes a speechless infant, the Light enters the darkness, the Life of the world will die for the world. The coming of this child, Jesus Christ, is the grace of God that brings salvation and has appeared to everyone.

We celebrate, then, the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. It is of course a matter of faith, to receive and believe in Jesus the Word made flesh, the Son of God. It is the same faith which was required of Joseph to actually believe and trust that Jesus was conceived by the Holy

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Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. It is the same faith which was required of the Shepherds to obey and to look for Christ the Saviour in a feeding trough of a dirty barn, in the dark streets of Bethlehem. It is that same faith which is required of us, to trust God, to take him at his Word, and to look for him in humility.

That is one birthday, Christ's birth for us. And we know and celebrate this birthday by faith. We say Happy Birthday to Jesus Christ the Lord and Saviour. But there is more to this day. He was born to give us second birth, and we celebrate not only his birth for us, but our rebirth and regeneration in him. When Jesus is born, we are re-born. In his birth, we have a brand new beginning, a second chance for all humanity. We celebrate, then, that the Son of God was born the Son of Man, and we rejoice that in him, human children may become the children of God. So today is not only Jesus' birthday, but the re-birthday of all humanity, of everyone who believes in him. Today is also our birthday by faith.

Thirdly, we celebrate not only his birth in Bethlehem of Mary for us, and our rebirth as the children of God in him and

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for him, but his birth in us. We pray rightly, “O holy child of Bethlehem, be born in us today.” This Church is our Bethlehem and God has called you here, by some angel or music or message or star. He has called you here, to the feet of his son, Jesus Christ. This is our house of bread, and here, too, we may know our God come to us in human flesh and blood to save us, and we may be assured of his goodness and loving kindness towards us. And this birthday, of Christ in us, is one of faith as well, for Christ dwells in our hearts by faith.

This is, then, a triple birthday known and celebrated by faith in Jesus Christ, worth all the rejoicing we can muster. We celebrate that Christ, our God and Saviour, was born for us, that we might be forgiven and live in the knowledge and love of God our Father. We celebrate that we have been born again as children of God, and brothers and sisters in God’s family. And we celebrate that Christ is born in us, that he dwells in us and we in him.

We rejoice, then, that:

1. Christ is born in Bethlehem

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2. That he was

Born that man no more may die,

Born to raise the sons of earth,

Born to give them second birth.

3. That he may

Be born in us today.

Three birthdays, Christ's for us, ours in Christ, and Christ's in us, these are worth all the glitz and glamour, the loudest praises and finest feasts.

In the light of Christmas, we begin to see one another as God sees us - infinitely loveable. The Advent hymn prays, "Shine forth and let thy light restore earth's own true loveliness once more." In Christ born of Mary, in Christmas, the love of God is revealed, and the loveliness of ourselves, of one another, of our fiends, and family, and enemies, and of the world is restored and revealed. All this we may see by faith. For love is revealed and loveliness restored. Thanks be to God.