

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds. Titus 2:11-14

I wonder as I wander, out under the sky, how Je-sus the Savior did come for to die, for poor ord'n'ry people like you and like I. I wonder as I wander, out under the sky.

During this season of preparation for Christ's birth and Christ's return, today's lesson asks us to refocus away from the mere festivity of the approaching season for the celebration and affirmation of faith. Yet I can't forget how this text will also be our New Testament lesson in our fast-approaching Christmas Eve Worship. Our first words today read: "*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all*" (2:11). They remind us of the very dawn and universality of God's GRACE, as seen and experienced in Christ's birth in our Christmas Eve gospel. Verse #12 continues to make a direct link between Christ's incarnation and moral life as it calls us to renounce and to, "...Live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly.

When Mary birthed Jesus, all in a cow's stall, came wisemen and farmers and shepherds and all, and high from the heavens a star's light did fall; the promise of the ages, it then did recall.

After spending 26.5 years as an intelligence officer before coming to ministry, I'm not uncomfortable about keeping and honoring secrets. And it's no secret my mother died on Christ the King Sunday last year, and as her Executor, this last year has been difficult, if not trying at times. But, don't we occasionally find ourselves making room for secrets, rather than finding ways to deal with them? Whether as a child or as an adult, sharing personal secrets can be scary, if not manifest a foreign concept. I thought often of my greatest secret but ultimately was too afraid that what I might gain in sharing would overcome the risk of telling others. I couldn't imagine anyone's secret being as dark as mine. My fear and shame ... were so powerful! Close to 50 years ago Scouters, I thought I could trust and rely upon, unfortunately showed me how they could take advantage of me. In those difficult times I realized speaking out only made things worse. Brokenness exists, and if you ever hear me using those specific words, this experience is likely a thought crossing my mind. It will likely also be the next thing "*I wonder*" about once I have time for reflection. Yet today's scripture describes how God's Grace brings ALL of us salvation by "*training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly.*" This Word of God is what moved me to share today as I continue my work in overcoming an unholy secret, and so both you and I might live ... "*Godly*" lives.

If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing, a star in the sky or a bird on the wing, or all of God's angels in heav'n for to sing, he surely could have had it, 'cause he was the king.

Verse #13 focuses upon Christ's advent in the incarnation of his first coming, as well as in his second coming as our "*blessed hope,*" before turning to Christ's redemptive work in V14. The three versus here provide an almost hymnic Christological formula in reminding us how Christ:

- 1) gave himself for us

- 2) to redeem us from all lawlessness
- 3) and purify for himself a chosen people

Here is where I find the strength to go beyond the shame and agony of my longest and until recently greatest secret. But is that only limited to me? NO, because this promise was made to all of God's children when we hear, "*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all*". I wonder if this was on the mind of John Jacob Niles when he wrote and set the Appalachian folk tune for a Christmas carol we still sing:

I wonder as I wander, out under the sky, how Je-sus the Savior did come for to die, for poor ord'n'ry people like you and like I. I wonder as I wander, out under the sky. (ELCA, WOV 642)

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