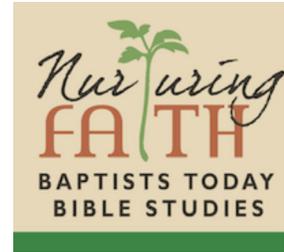


# Adult Teaching Resources

December 25, 2016



## Season of Advent (November 27-December 25)

Psalm 122 – “Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem”

Matthew 3:1-12 – “Starving for Hope”

Matthew 11:2-11 – “The Real McCoy”

Matthew 1:18-25 – “The Invisible Man”

## Season of Christmas (December 25 – January 1)

Titus 3:4-7 – “Why Christmas Matters”

[www.nurturingfaith.net](http://www.nurturingfaith.net)

Subscribe to *Nurturing Faith* to access the core Bible content for this lesson. Find links and videos related to this lesson.

# Why Christmas Matters

*Titus 3:4-7*

## FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

## Bible Background

---

*On this special Sunday, Christmas Day, we are not studying the Luke version of Jesus' birth. Instead, we will spend time in Titus, reading and studying why the Christmas story matters.*

For better understanding of the book of Titus, become familiar with the explanation our lesson writer provides. There is good background information about the book which leads to our section of scripture for today.

Our section immediately follows Paul's encouragement for all believers to be "obedient to God, respectful of governing authorities, and courteous to one another, avoiding the evil behaviors they had once practiced." (from our lesson writer)

While there are no special words or phrases in our scripture, the passage can be divided into three unique sections: a sinful people; a loving God; a blessed hope. We will explore each of these sections throughout the study.

## Opening

---

It's Christmas Day! A day of giving and receiving and love and hope. As a way of sharing on this special day, ask these questions for your class to share:

What is the best (or most memorable) gift you have ever received at Christmas?

What is the best (or most memorable) gift you have ever given at Christmas?

How do you describe the gift God gave us at Christmas?

## Reading the Bible

---

If you feel it would help your group celebrate this glorious day, begin your time in the Bible by reading the Christmas story found in Luke 2:1-20. This is the story we know at Christmas. This is what happened.

The passage for today, Titus 3:3-8, gives us the reason the Christmas story matters. Ask someone to read the passage and then ask these questions for an understanding of the text.

What are the seven ways Paul describes believers in the passage?

What has happened to save us? What are other ways that would be as effective to save us?

What is the reason we are given as to why we are saved? Do you think we need to be saved? Why do you say that?

What is our reward? Is that reward enough? Why do you say that?

## Making Connections

---

What contemporary examples can you give for each of the seven descriptions Paul shares about us in the passage? Do you consider each of those to be sins? Why? After hearing that list, how does that make you feel about your faith journey? How does that make you feel about the gift of Jesus?

Where do you find God's love in our passage? If you had the opportunity to provide a gift of goodness and loving kindness for humanity, what would you give? Would it be sufficient for all the sins listed in the passage?

What does it mean to be saved? How does God wash us clean for salvation? How do you explain that idea to others?

What does it mean to become justified or right with God? How is that possible? What do we have to do to earn that? How is our justification a gift of God's love?

How do we know all of this is true? Is that enough "proof" for you? Why?

## So What?

---

Christmas is a time of stories. We have the story of Jesus' birth, the Christmas story. But we also have stories about our families, Christmases past, special memories, and important traditions.

Using the idea of storytelling, ask for volunteers to share what the Christmas story (the birth of Jesus) means to them and their faith journey. This has the possibility to be a holy time of sharing.

## The Challenge

---

Christmas comes just once a year, but our lives are impacted in significant ways by the gift of Jesus Christ. As a group, brainstorm together why this day is so important to Christians and specifically think of ways your group can share that good news with others.

After coming up with a list, pick one or two ways your group can share, and then make a group commitment to live that out in the coming year. Every day, work to share the good news of the birth of Jesus.

## Prayer

---

Close your time with a prayer, thanking God for the gift of Jesus. Praise God for this special day and ask God to help you share the good news of the Christmas story every day.

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Christmas on Sunday**—One might think that Christmas falling on Sunday is a rare occurrence, but it is no more or less likely than for Christmas to fall on any other day. If not for leap years, Christmas would occur on Sunday every seventh year, but when leap years are figured in, the period between Christmas Sundays can vary from five to eleven years. After this year, Christmas will fall on a Sunday in 2022, 2033, 2039, 2044 and 2050.

**Today’s text**—The official lectionary text from the epistles for today is Titus 3:4-7. We’ve expanded the text to include v. 3 and incorporated a look back at chapters 1-2 in order to set the context more fully.

**Titus**—The letter of Titus is one of the “Pastoral Epistles.” They all claim to have been written by Paul, and are traditionally attributed to him. Some modern scholars cite evidence to suggest that the letters come from a later period, perhaps written by a disciple writing in Paul’s name. While that is a possibility, the theology of the letters, and especially Titus, is in harmony with the views expressed in other letters in which Pauline authorship is not questioned. For simplicity’s sake, we will refer to the author as Paul.

The letter to Titus presumes that Paul had traveled, preached, and established churches on the island of Crete, and that he had left Titus in charge of them. This presents a bit of a quandary, because Paul’s only known visit to Crete came when he was being carried as a prisoner to Rome (Acts 27:8), and likely had limited time or freedom to travel and preach. The account in Acts is concerned mainly with bad weather that blew them away from Crete, leading to two weeks at sea and a shipwreck on Malta (Acts 27:9-28:1).

It is often proposed that Paul was released from his imprisonment in Rome at some point, and that he resumed his travels and preaching before being arrested a second time. In 2 Tim. 4:16-17, Paul refers to his “first defense,” which may imply what he was then facing a second defense, though that need not require a second arrest. He could have been speaking of his first defense, before Felix in Caesarea, knowing that his appeal to Caesar would lead to a second defense in Rome.

Whether before or after his arrest, it is entirely possible that Paul traveled to places not mentioned in Luke’s account of his itinerary in the book of Acts. Whether Paul had spent much time in Crete or not, he was clearly concerned about the churches there, and took some responsibility for them.

## Digging Deeper *continued*

**Philanthropy**—The Greek word translated as “loving kindness” (NRSV) or “love for mankind” (NET) is *philanthropos*, a combination the words *philos* (love) and *anthropos* (human). The English word “philanthropy” is a direct derivation. In our time the word is used mainly in relation to charitable donations for human good, but it speaks of a loving disposition toward others, not limited to financial gifts.

**Sure sayings**—Titus 3:8a marks one of several “sayings” texts in the Pastoral Epistles, each marked by a phrase like “The saying is sure,” or “the saying is sure and worthy of acceptance.” This is one of two instances in which “The saying is sure” follows the saying in question (the other is 1 Tim. 4:9). In four other cases, all of them shorter, “the saying is sure” comes first, followed by the saying (1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11).

## The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### How should we understand the relationship between “rebirth” and “renewal”?

As mentioned in the Bible study, scholars have proposed a variety of ways to interpret Paul’s statement that salvation comes “through the water (washing) of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (v. 5). Remembering that the term translated “water” in the NRSV is better translated as “washing,” and that the word for “rebirth” could also be rendered as “regeneration,” let’s take a closer look at the options:

1. To read “rebirth and renewal” as two different stages in the Christian experience, with water/washing being a reference to rebirth through baptism, and renewal being the ensuing work of the Holy Spirit. This reflects a fairly literal reading of the Greek *kai* (“and”) as a connective between two different things. Some mainline denominations would interpret this to speak of the two steps of conversion and confirmation. Those in Pentecostal/Holiness traditions lean toward this view, believing that one’s initial baptism/conversion should be followed by a second “baptism in the Spirit.”
2. To read the *kai* as what scholars call “epexegetical,” meaning that the second term is intended to explain the meaning of the first. In this case, “renewing” would not indicate a different experience, but would clarify the term “rebirth” – rebirth is renewal that comes through the Holy Spirit, an initial experience with ongoing effects.
3. To read “washing” as the primary subject, with both rebirth and renewal explaining its significance: God saves us through the washing, that is, through the rebirth and renewal that comes through the Holy Spirit being poured out on us. A variation on this theme is to see “washing” through baptism as the symbol of one’s rebirth and renewal. Those who take a sacramental view of baptism as actively conveying grace might see “washing” as the effective event of rebirth and renewal, preferring the former option. Believers (like most Baptists) who regard baptism as a symbolic act would opt for the latter.

Some scholars parse the options even further, but the important thing remains unchanged: people who once lived in sin can be cleansed and in a sense reborn as new people in Christ, with the Holy Spirit effecting daily renewal in the lives of those who seek God.

(For more, see Donald Hagner, *1&2 Timothy, Titus*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentaries [Smyth & Helwys, 2010], 81-82; William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, vol. 46 of Word Biblical Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000], 448-449;

Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011], 204-206; or other quality commentaries.)