Rev. Gregory Gibbons
Lola Park Lutheran Church
Redford, MI 48239

I Timothy 1:15
CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THIS WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS

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"Tis the season to be jolly! Falalala! Lalalala! Have you ever watched a Hallmark Christmas movie? There are plenty of them on at this time. I believe that they made at least twelve new ones for this holiday season. If you've never seen one, I will tell you what they are all about. I don't really think that I'll be giving away the plot because they are all basically the same. You have a pretty girl and a nice looking guy. One of them is having troubles seeing the true meaning of Christmas. There are problems with family or work or something else. In the end they will solve all their problems, fall in love and live happily ever after as Christmas songs play in the background. You might even cry.

We all wish that life was like that. We all wish that every Christmas was like that. But we know that life is really not like that. There is this romanticized picture of Christmas. The fire is burning in the fireplace, the children are gathered around the tree looking at their presents, the snow is lightly falling and we listen to music sung by Andy Williams, Perry Como or Bing Crosby. Yes, that is what Christmas is truly like!

I believe that everyone would love a Christmas like that every year, but in reality it just doesn't happen. There are many people trying to put on a smile but it hurts to do so. Some have lost their jobs and some have been without one for a long time. Some are suffering painful illnesses like arthritis. Some have been diagnosed with cancer or other diseases. Some have suffered heart attacks or strokes that have left them weakened and weary. Christmas is a day that demands family and yet their family is not here. A promising marriage ended in divorce and the children are with your ex. Mom or Dad or your spouse died this past year and your heart just breaks thinking of them. Children left and never returned because someone said something that couldn't be taken back. Some left because they fell into Satan's temptations and are entrenched in some pretty horrible things. Some have lost their homes. Some have lost their possessions due to fires, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes or criminal activity. Some have been betrayed by friends and some know the damage they have done to the lives of others by careless speech and actions. This is not a day that they enjoy.

Our Christmas mailing this year announces that we offer peace to the broken or more specifically Christ offers peace to the broken. We know what broken is like and it is not fun. Many of the toys and gifts that people have received this morning are not going to last. Some will last a few weeks, some a few months, others a few years. Some will be broken already this afternoon. Maybe they will be stepped on. Perhaps pieces will get lost when you grab all the wrapping paper. Perhaps it was just shoddily made and you can't get a refund. A child might cry for a while but in the long run it will subside. You will get something new to take its place. You lived your life without it once. You can do it again.

Our relationship with God is another matter. Imagine that you have a precious family heirloom. It is a hand blown glass ornament that has adorned your family's Christmas tree for generations. You aren't paying attention and the ornament drops onto the floor and shatters into a thousand pieces. Your mother-in-law who gave you that ornament is coming for Christmas. She always looks at that ornament. What are you going to do? You can't repair it. You can't buy a new one. All you can do is cry because you can't fix what is broken. I remember one of my father's

friends giving me a confederate fifty dollar bill. I got into a fight with my sister and ended up ripping the bill in half. That was not the worst part. I had to tell my father's friend what I had done. I was scared to death.

Think of what Adam and Eve were thinking. They had listened to Satan in the Garden of Eden and believed his lies that their lives would be better off without God. They doubted God's truthfulness and they doubted God's love. They knew that they were in trouble so they tried to hide from God, but God found them. Then they tried to shift the blame to others, but God would hold them accountable for what they had done. They were guilty. They stood there before God naked and ashamed. They were helpless. There was nothing that they could do to solve the problem of brokenness.

St. Paul says in our text this morning: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst." Why are we here this morning? Are we all a bunch of pretty good people who are so much better than others? If that's what you're thinking, you're in the wrong place. This is where sinners assemble and congregate. This is where broken people come looking for forgiveness as they see the brokenness of their lives. This is a place for imperfect people, for people who cannot solve their own problems of sin, for people who acknowledge that they need help, help that can only come from God in the form of a Savior.

Many people look at Christmas as a cute story with a little baby. We love babies. We like to see nativity scenes with Joseph, Mary, shepherds and angels, sheep and cows. We get sentimental as we see little children enact the story in Christmas services. But there is a much bigger question here. Why was this child born? The answer is in his name. He will be given the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.

This was God's plan, a plan that he announced to Adam and Eve already in the Garden of Eden. They were unable to save themselves. God would have to take the initiative. God would have to do all the work. God is a God of perfect justice. He cannot simply overlook sin. Sin must be punished. Sin must be paid for in blood. God could have punished us. God should have punished us. But God is also a God of perfect love. In his love he would send his Son to take our place. He would by his perfect life do what we were unable to do in keeping the Law perfectly and by his innocent and atoning death undo what we had done.

Do we truly think about the world that our Lord Jesus was born into? It was not pretty. It is a world where children are abused and tortured by people who call themselves "Mom" and "Dad." It is a world where people are brutally murdered in the streets because they "disrespected" someone. It is a world where people will strap on bombs and blow up a busload of people in the name of a false god. It is a world where women will sell their own bodies to make a living. It is a world where people will steal money from their spouse or children's college funds to support their habits of gambling, alcohol or drug abuse. It is a world that is filled with sinners of every stripe. It doesn't matter if you are black or white or yellow or red. It doesn't matter if you are young or old or male or female. We are all sinners. And Christ came to save us!

We know what resides in our hearts: the lusts, the greed, the envy, the anger, the hatred, the selfishness. We may try to hide it but it is there. We know it and God knows it. God knows it even after we have forgotten it or tried to forget it. We are sinners. We have guilt and we have brokenness.

And yet Christ comes into this world to save us. He comes to save sinners. The Apostle Paul knew that so well. He considered himself the chief of sinners, the worst of sinners. He tried to kill Christ's followers. He met the risen Christ on the way to Damascus and saw his sin. There was nothing he could do to bring back the people that he had killed. And yet he could find forgiveness through the one who now called him as his apostle to the Gentiles.

Jesus was the Word made flesh. He chose to leave the glories of heaven and become one of us. He chose to dwell with his people. Did anyone twist his arm to make him enter Mary's womb and be born in a stable, wrapped with cloths of blood and laid on a bed of straw where donkeys would poop? Did God the Father trick him into coming into this world? No, Jesus would do exactly what it took to be our Savior.

How hard was it to be silent when your enemies wanted to kill you and you had the full power of God? All you needed was to blink an eye and they would die and excruciating death, a death they fully deserved. How hard was it to drink the cup of your Father's wrath upon sin, not merely tasting it, but draining every last vile drop of things so horrible that most of us cannot even imagine? And yet you would because you are love! A love so great that we cannot imagine it or comprehend it!

Facebook has a button where we can "like" something. We cannot merely like Jesus. We can hate him as many people did and still do because they don't want their deeds of darkness exposed by the Light of the world. We can fear him because our sinful nature cannot stand in the presence of holiness. Or we can worship him as the King of kings and the Lord of lords which he is. But we cannot merely like him. If we don't see ourselves as the chief of sinners, we make Jesus to be a very small Savior that we don't really need.

Jesus gives us the strength to walk. He is with us always, even when we decide we want to walk alone for a while. He called us by name at our baptism. He is not going to leave us. He has taken the filth of our sin and smeared it all over himself. He took it all to the cross and left it there. No matter who you are, no matter what you have done, no matter how hard you've tried to forgive yourself, Jesus came to save you. Yes, you! Even if you were the only sinner on the face of this earth, Jesus still would have gone through every bit of his suffering for you. It had to be that way. God loved you so much that he was willing to sacrifice himself for your brokenness. He brought you peace. Your sins are forgiven. St. John writes: "The blood of Jesus, God's Son, purifies us from every sin."

Jesus came to save sinners. Every week as we come to church we are reminded of that fact over and over. And it is fact. It is truth. We see the Savior who was born for us, the Savior who would stand in our stead at Jordan's River, the Savior who would take the pain and insults of people that he came to save, the Savior who would willingly go to the cross to suffer his Father's wrath upon sin, the Savior so powerful that he rose again from the dead, the Savior who would ascend into heaven to prepare a place for us, the Savior who would send the Holy Spirit to give us the gift of faith, the Savior who would bring us into his kingdom through the washing of water and the Word in Holy Baptism, the Savior that would offer us his very body and blood to assure us of the forgiveness of sins, the Savior who would return and bring us home to heaven forever.

Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners. He is the Word made flesh, our Savior, our only hope. Have a blessed Christmas! AMEN.