

Day of St Stephen 1. Johannes 3,1-3



1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3 All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Look, dear congregation!

"See what love the Father in heaven has shown us." - that is how John wakes us up this morning. Look, look, fix your eyes on the love of God.

Yes, God's love can be seen. It has a face. It has become visible and has taken shape: It is the child in the manger; Jesus, God's son. This love has an indescribable effect. It is full of power. It changes people and thus the world.

Here in the Bible John describes the effect of God's love: Look, Christ is born:

1. Through him we are God's children. 2. Through him our lives are renewed. 3. Through him we have a living hope. In short: see God's love for us, for us, in us.

1. Look, Christ is born: Through him we are God's children.

We humans are God's creatures. But we are no longer children of God by birth. By nature we are blind to God. There is still an inkling among us humans that God exists. Many religions have a sign of this. But we are blind to God's great love.

The Bible calls this blindness: sin. No matter how hard we try, no matter how much we pull ourselves together and how great things are achieved by people in technology, medicine and art, the blindness to God remains.

Who can heal us from it? Which doctor can free us from this blindness?

God himself says: "I am the Lord your physician" (Exodus 15:26) and sends Jesus. And Jesus heals. He opens our eyes to the presence of God. He brings us back to God. He gives us again the deep, intimate fellowship with the one who holds everything in his hands.

See, dear congregation: The baptismal water together with the word of God that was poured over us and spoken has connected us with God. The apostle Paul therefore speaks of the "baptism of rebirth and renewal through the Holy Spirit" when he thinks of baptism. (Titus 3:5)

Since then we have not only borne the name of the Lord Christ. We are truly God's children: "See what love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God, and so we are." - That is a fact that makes us happy and is contagious. And it all began back then in Bethlehem, with Jesus, the child in the manger and your baptism.

We are sometimes asked about our congregation. What do we answer? Sometimes: Well, the congregation still has so many members; there are still some who read the Bible, there is still a youth group, still... .

But why do we say "still", dear congregation? The fact that people believe in Jesus, that people come together in Jesus' name, is by no means the most normal thing in the world. That is a miracle. And you are part of that miracle. And the church is not an old museum that still exists. No one can make themselves a child of God. That is a gift. And God gives us the right to be children.

That is why there are already two or three people who read the Bible together. That is why 8 or 15 or even 50 people come to worship, pray together and give glory to God. We can only be amazed and rejoice at that. Just like in Bethlehem, Jesus today brings people of very different backgrounds together in his presence.

'He or she runs to church every Sunday,' some people think. And behind closed doors: 'But they are no better.' - That is certainly a shame. God be praised. But you can also look at it differently: Maybe he or she is serious about being children of God. Whatever was or is in their lives, they just want to be there when the congregation meets with their Lord Christ.

See, Christ is born: through him we are children of God.

II) Through him our lives are renewed.

A mother walks down the street with her newborn. An acquaintance stops, looks into the stroller and calls out: Just like his father. The mother: That's a girl. The acquaintance: But the family is written all over his face.

Yes, dear congregation! Children always get something from their parents in their cradle, you can sense their origins. They observe their parents and imitate them. Suddenly you hear the little one talking like his father and see his mother in his gestures.

It's similar with us Christians, the children of God. With baptism we received God's spirit. And those who look to Christ do not remain as they are. Jesus showed us how he listens to people and talks to them; how he spoke to his father; how he testifies to the truth but never attacks others violently. He showed us what is most important in life: that we stay with him.

Those who follow Jesus change their lives. Others sense who Christians are guided by, whose spirit they are children of. For example, it was a trademark of Christians in Rome that they took care of the sick who had been deported and abandoned children.

When our communities were founded in the 19th century, people met in houses for Bible study - that was a trademark. Many tasks are undertaken voluntarily in our communities - often without much fanfare. How much love for Christ and his community can be felt there. Quite a few people are amazed at this commitment.

You can also experience this in your job: The boss of a medium-sized company in Thuringia told me a few years ago that one of his employees said to him: You can also pray for that. - In order to maintain jobs and survive on the market, the company had to expand. The neighboring property was ideal, but the owner had utopian ideas. Today the neighboring property and building are included in the company complex. The boss certainly didn't just fold his hands back then. But he told this story again and again: Boss, you can also pray for that.

Anyone who has been gifted by Christ himself cannot do anything other than pass it on. In this way, Christ brings about renewal and change in my own life and in the way people live together.

And this change goes hand in hand with an inner cleansing: that guilt is recognized, confessed and forgiven in the name of God. See, Christ is born: through him we are children of God. Through him our lives are renewed.

III) Through him we have a living hope.

John is a realist. He writes: "We are already children of God; but it has not yet been revealed what we will be. But we know that when it is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is."

John states soberly: We are indeed children of God, but this has not yet become fully visible. This is where the "yet" belongs. Completion - fully the Father, fully the Mother - is still pending. The Kingdom of God is not yet visible.

We are indeed freed from the compulsion of sin through Christ. But we are not yet sinless. Who would deny this? We fall again and again into the traps and snares set up by the adversary of God. This is and remains a temptation, the distress of every Christian.

Should we give up because of this? Should we give up, turn away from Christ and his church, resign ourselves to the idea: There's no point anyway?

Don't do that, dear sister, dear brother! Stay with Jesus Christ. John wrote in his Christmas letter: Look what God has done. See, God's love has been given a face in Jesus. Through him you are God's child. We are on the way, but not yet at the destination.

And the path, however bumpy it may be, is not an uncertain path. Jesus has gone ahead so that all who follow him can reach the destination: where fear and lamentation are silenced, sadness gives way to joy, sin and imperfection come to an end and love drives out all envy and hatred.

Look, dear church, Christ has come into our world. Look at the Christmas message again and again. Sing about the miracle, come to the Lord's table, kneel before him with the shepherds. Through Christ we are God's children. Through him there is renewal in our lives and through him we have a living hope. "See what love the Father in heaven has given us." Amen.