

There's an old Dennis the Menace cartoon. Joey is eating cookies he got from Mrs. Wilson. Joey must have thought he was pretty special, until Dennis explains to him, "She doesn't give you cookies because you're nice. She gives you cookies because she's nice."

The Letter to Titus says God's kindness and generous love appeared in Jesus "not because of any righteous deeds we had done, but because of God's mercy." Jesus didn't come because we were good; he came because he was good.

Today we conclude our celebration of the Christmas season in the Catholic Church, and this passage teaches us one final lesson before we let the season go. We conclude our season with today's feast, the Baptism of the Lord, because this is one more feast of the goodness of God. God was good enough to give us Jesus and to reveal Jesus. Our Savior was revealed in the manger in Bethlehem, he was revealed again to the magi, and now as an adult he is revealed even more publicly in his baptism.

What did the world do to deserve this? Absolutely nothing. It was a gift as free as Mrs. Wilson's cookies. God sent Jesus into the world for our salvation as a gift, a free lunch, no strings attached.

Sometimes we hesitate to be so generous. We hate for somebody to take advantage of us. We size up the sincerity of a stranger before making a handout. We want spouses to prove their repentance before extending forgiveness. And we expect kids to get all their jobs done before getting their cookies.

But other times, we are generous because it feels right. We help strangers find their way. We treat spouses when they least expect it. We give kids more than they can ever repay. We become generous because something wonderful happens to us when we are.

That something wonderful is Christmas. Whenever we give people what they don't deserve or didn't ask for, we give Christmas. Joy comes to the world – not just the joy of children or adults at Christmas, but the joy of God at Christmas. On that day Jesus was revealed to us, the Letter to Titus says, "so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life." God did that

not because of our deeds, but because of his mercy. When we follow that example, we celebrate Christmas every day.