

25 December 2003
The Nativity of our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Jesus: Descended from God”

Text: John 1:1-14 (Isaiah 52:7-10)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

This Advent season we spent some time looking at the genealogy of Jesus. We considered the fact that Jesus was descended from sinners, although was not a sinner Himself. That He was descended from kings, and was the King of kings. And that finally, He was also descended from some people we know next to nothing about – but that although they were anonymous to us, they were not anonymous to God. And with this genealogy, we know that Jesus was truly made man. Like us in every way. . . . And this morning, John completes the picture for us. He gives us “*the rest of the story.*” He tells us, in no uncertain terms, that while Jesus is descended from a human ancestry, He is also descended from a divine ancestry. He is not only true man, He is also true God. ***The Word made flesh.***

Now, for you who have spent much, or most, or all of your life in the church, this is not new information! You confess this every week in the Creed. But we live in a world where this is denied by many. I heard it on the radio again just this week. An Episcopal priest said that the message of Christmas, “***Peace on earth, goodwill toward men***” is, in fact, the message of every religion. And especially, he said, of Christians, Jews, and Muslims, since these three religions all trace back to a common ancestor, namely Abraham. We are all working toward peace and goodwill. So let us work together.

And that is the message of Christmas . . . *for the world.* For the world, it is the annual time of the year to try to set aside our differences and live in peace, if just for a moment. But there is always the hope that it will last longer than a moment, and that perhaps, just perhaps, we can achieve this lofty and elusive goal . . . if we just try hard enough; if we just work together enough.

But actually, the message of Christmas is just the opposite of that! The message of Christmas is that we cannot achieve peace and goodwill on earth. We are unable to achieve peace with ourselves, or with one another, or with God. We simply can't do it! And so if there is going to be “***peace on earth, goodwill toward men,***” it will have to be

accomplished by the One of whom these words were spoken. We cannot take these words and re-interpret them and apply them to ourselves, or to Abraham, or to anyone else! Because they were spoken by angels regarding only one – the One born this day, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in the manger. This One who was not just another human being trying to accomplish human goals. No! It is the One born to accomplish what we cannot. The One who is not only true man but also true God. The Saviour, Jesus the Christ.

And so to confess that ***“the Word became flesh,”*** (as we heard from St. John), that Jesus is God in the flesh, is to confess that there is a reason for this. It is confess our sin, our failure, and our helplessness. It is to confess that our relationship with God and our relationships with each other are broken. And it is to confess that no amount of human effort can fix this – there is only One who can. One who is uniquely qualified to bring God and man back together, to pay the price for the sin and failure of every human being that ever lived, and to bring peace to us once again. This One would have to be a man, in order to take the place of man and die our death, and yet He would have to also be God, in order that His sacrifice would be sufficient not just for Himself, but for the world. That would take divine blood. And so ***“the Word became flesh.”*** The Son of God, descended from God, to be our Saviour.

And so as we look to the manger this day, and see a helpless baby, we also believe what we cannot see – that this helpless baby is also the eternal God, strong to save. Or, as we heard from the prophet Isaiah, the manger is where ***“the Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations.”*** For *“to bear your arm”* is a way of showing strength. It is to roll up your sleeves and get down to business. It is to show your muscles. That God does this in weakness, as a baby, is not a sign of weakness, but of His great mercy and love. That He would descend to such a low; that He would descend to such weakness, in order to save us.

And so He looks weak in the manger. He looks weak on the cross. And yet He is nowhere so strong. Strong to die. Strong to lay down His life. Strong to bear our sin and take it away from us.

And so as we look to the manger and to the cross, ***“we see His glory.”*** His glory, which did not consider equality with God something to be grasped and held over our heads in a threatening way, but who made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant. (Philippians 2) Taking upon Himself our nature, in order to redeem us, infected with the disease of sin and death. His glory is not that He is glorious – His glory is that He left His throne in Heaven and descended to us this day, descended from God, that in ascending back to the Father, He might take us to be with Him there, in peace, in Paradise, forever.

And because He did, there is ***“peace on earth, goodwill toward men.”*** We again have peace with God through the forgiveness of our sins. The forgiveness that He speaks to you here in the Absolution. The forgiveness He gives to you here in His body and blood. In these means too is His glory shown to us. These things that look so ordinary, but yet are filled with the power and strength of God. For here, as in the manger, is God for us.

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

That, dear friends in Christ, is the heart of Christmas. That is the truth of Christmas. That is the glory of Christmas.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.