

20 December 2006
Advent 3 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Manifested in You!

Text: Colossians 1:27; John 17:20-23

In five more days, the mystery will be over. What children try to peek into and adults try to guess will finally be revealed. The presents will be opened and the mystery will be over . . . for another year.

But the mystery, the glory, and the wonder of the gift lying *not* under a tree, but in a manger, goes on. The mystery of Immanuel, God with us, in human flesh. And the more we know this One, this child, this Saviour, not the less but the *greater* the mystery! Not that He becomes less known to us, no; but because the more we know Him the greater the mystery of His love. The mystery of why He would lower Himself and give Himself for sinners such as you and I. And so not only great is this mystery, it is a mystery in which you and I are *involved*.

One early church father wondered at the mystery this way: “[*It is*] to have brought men more senseless than stones to the dignity of angels. . . . It is as though one were to take a dog, quite consumed with hunger and the mange, foul and loathsome to see, and not so much as able to move but lying deserted, and were to make him all at once into a man, and to display him upon the royal throne.” (St. John Chrysostom, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, NT IX, p. 25) And so this mystery is much more than a reclamation project, or a renovation of our lives – it is a **resurrection**. A giving of *new* life, and the hope of glory. Or as we heard from St. Paul tonight: “**To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**”

Christ in you. Those words tonight tell us the third way God manifests Himself to us. **Yes**, He is manifested *in the flesh*, and **yes**, He is manifested in *weakness*, and **yes**, we see and know God as He wants to be seen and known when we see and know Him in the manger and on the cross. But the work of God is *more* than the knowledge of what God has done for you; it is more than history – it is what He is doing for you *even now*. It is Jesus being applied to your life now. It is His forgiveness now. It is His life and resurrection now. It is **Christ in you**.

And that, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is **baptismal language**. For the Son of God did not only come into the world *in general* – He came in a very specific person, in a very specific place: Jesus of Nazareth, born in Bethlehem, the city of David. And so also He

did not come only to save the world *in general* – He came to save specific people. *All* people, yes; but not *en masse*! He saves very specifically, very individually, very personally. He didn't come to save generic humankind – He came to save you.

And that He does in the waters of Holy Baptism. Through water and the Word comes this mystery: that your Saviour comes to you and is born in you. He joins you to Himself and Himself to you. And so all His riches become yours as, joined to Him in His life, His death, and His resurrection to new life, you are resurrected to a new life. In that flood He washes away your sins, rescues you from death and from the power of the devil, and makes you His own. What happened some 2,000 years ago becomes for you a present reality, each and every day of your life. And so Jesus is not dead history or mere knowledge, but living and active in your life.

And so for the Church, Christmas has always been a time of celebrating Baptism. For Christmas isn't just about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, but the mystery of the birth of Jesus in our hearts, and our re-birth in Him. The mystery that while God remains very much a God outside of us, transcending time and space, and taking care of all creation – he is at the same time also very much God in us, by grace through faith. Involved in our life, and involving us in His life.

This is what we heard from Jesus, in His prayer as recorded by St. John: “. . . ***that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you . . . The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me . . .***” Is this not a wonder? That we who are by nature *more senseless than stones and more foul and loathsome than a diseased and dying dog*, are now united to God in Christ Jesus. And truly united. Not the unity that we see in the world, an agreeing to disagree; or of simply putting up with one another. No, it is the unity that we see in Jesus Himself – the uniting of God and man in one person. A perfect unity, He in us and we in Him. ***Christ in us, our hope of glory.***

And this hope is not the hope that we see especially at this time of year – the hopeful wishing for certain gifts; and the uncertainty that comes with that – whether I will receive what I am hoping for or not. No, this is a sure and certain hope, based not upon our own wishful desires, but upon the sure and certain promises of God. His promise of life, His promise of forgiveness, His promise of Heaven. His promise sealed with His own blood. That these riches put not under a tree, but in a manger and on a cross, might not be here today and gone tomorrow, but be an everlasting gift to us.

That even as we struggle through this life, with all its ups and downs, its changes and chances, its mistakes and regrets – we have this constant: the love and forgiveness of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. That no matter what comes upon me in this world and life, I am not

alone, for I live in Christ and Christ in me. And that is how God wants me to know Him – in the flesh, in my flesh; in weakness, in my weakness; come to the world, come to me. This is God for you. Now and always. Merry Christmas!

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