

24 December 2006  
Advent 4

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“My Soul Magnifies the Lord”

Text: Micah 5:2a-5; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-56

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

From the author to the Hebrews we heard earlier: “*Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired . . . in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.*” But how can this be? How could the God who in the Old Testament established the Tabernacle and the Temple and the Priesthood and the whole sacrificial system *not* desire these sacrifices, *nor* take pleasure in them?

Well, it is true because God is not a God of death, but of life. In the beginning, when God created the world, He did not create men or animals to die, but to live – to live together in harmony, and to enjoy the world and life that He had given. *That* was God’s desire, and what He would take pleasure in – *our* pleasure. For He made this world for us.

But you know the story. How man chose temptation instead of obedience, chaos instead of harmony, and death instead of life. It *seemed* so insignificant – a piece of fruit, how bad could that be? But it was devastating – to the garden, to the man and woman, to all of creation, and to our relationship with God.

But that we might have hope, that we might not die in the sin we chose for ourselves, God gave the Law and the sacrificial system. He had no pleasure in the killing of His creation, His beloved animals. But us men and women, the crown of His creation, made in His image and likeness, needed this. That each and every time an animal was slain, its blood spilled and splashed against the altar of God, we would remember – that should be *our* blood; that should be *me*, because I am the sinner. That is the penalty for my sin. But that I might not die, but live, God is providing a substitute for me, that by faith in His goodness and promise, I be forgiven.

**And that is why we rejoice today!** The substitute, promised by God and foretold by prophets; the substitute that all those animals and blood pointed to, is born into our world. A sacrificial lamb, the Lamb of God, born among animals, and laid in a feed trough. For the very Son of God *a body had been prepared*, from a virgin, born without the stain of sin, to be the perfect substitute. And in Him, atonement be made for the sin of the world when dies

the innocent for the guilty, the perfect for the sinner, the Creator for His creatures. And that one so dying, entering death unjustly, defeat death and live again. And so life again rule over death; that sacrifices no longer be needed; and that we who are held captive under sin and death, be set free from these tyrants and live, once and for all.

This is the birth spoken of by the prophet Micah, that would take place in the little town of Bethlehem, which *seemed* so insignificant! But not so – for this is the place where the Son of God would come to earth, leaping down from His royal throne with both feet, and into the swaddling clothes of a newborn baby. To be our peace, our *peacemaker*, to the ends of the earth. To bring order out of the chaos of our sin, that we may once again dwell in harmony with God and men.

And so it came to pass. The angel Gabriel came armed with the Word and Spirit of God to a virgin in the little town of Nazareth. God had not forgotten His promise, spoken to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to David and his offspring – but had now come to fulfill it. For it was the right time, the fullness of time. And a Saviour was conceived. Just like you and I, but also *unlike* you and I. For He is not only the son of man, but also the Son of God. And so Mary was no mere mother, but the blessed mother of God. Elizabeth and John knew it – John not able to contain himself, but leaping for joy even while still in the womb! It was happening, all happening. Not just a birth, but the plan. The plan of life, of forgiveness, of salvation. The Lord doing great things for us!

**And that is why we rejoice today!** For if *blessed is she who believed*, then also – and even more! – blessed are *we* who believe. For by faith His blessings are our blessings. *Even in the midst of lives that may not looked very blessed.* For consider Mary, blessed Mary. How was she blessed after the angel came to her? She had the challenge of telling the man to which she was engaged that she was pregnant, but not unfaithful. She had to live in a town where everyone would look at her as an adulteress. She had to travel to Bethlehem while great with child, and give birth outdoors because there was no room at the inn. She had to flee to a foreign country to save the life of her child, and then stand idly by while those who hated her Son unjustly took His life by hanging Him on a cross. And yet ***all generations call her blessed***, for so she was.

And you too, blessed by grace through faith. For blessing comes in many shapes and sizes, in things as wonderful as childbirth and as challenging as death. Yet in all things, you are blessed in Christ Jesus. For ***you have been sanctified*** (made holy) ***through the offering of His body once for all.*** And so in Holy Baptism you are made holy as *the* substitute becomes *your* substitute. In Holy Communion you are made holy as *His* blood is splashed upon *your* lips and heart. In Holy Absolution you are made holy as *His* peace is declared to be *your* peace. And so sanctified and blessed, there is nothing in this world that can separate you from His love and blessedness. (Rom 8:32, 39) For God's will has been done. And so in His Son,

and in you, He is well pleased.

Like Mary, some of you will celebrate this Christmas blessed with the joy of a new birth. Some of you will be challenged to celebrate this Christmas for the first time without a loved one, feeling the sting of death. For me and my family, we had both of those things last year! And some of you will have other difficulties, joys, sorrows, and trials to face. But in it all, we can sing with Mary:

***"My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant."***

Yes, He has looked, and always looks. He who has promised is faithful. He who has claimed you as His own is true to His Word. He who sent his Son will never forsake you. And He who

***"has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
as he spoke to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his offspring forever"***

will also help you. For His desire and pleasure is not in your death, or in your struggles, but in your life. And so He *came* and He *comes* to give you life. Not life as defined by the world, in the things and pleasures of this world, but life in Him. For life in Him is life eternal.

And so today we join Elizabeth is rejoicing in our Lord. Today we join John in leaping for joy. Today we join Mary in magnifying the Lord. ***For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.*** (Luke 2:11)

Or in the words of one hymn writer:

*Oh, rejoice, ye Christians loudly, For our joy hath now begun;  
Wondrous things our God hath done.  
Tell abroad His goodness proudly Who our race hath honored thus  
That he deigns to dwell with us.*

*See, my soul, thy Savior chooses Weakness here and poverty;  
In such love He comes to thee.  
Neither crib nor cross refuses; All He suffers for thy good  
To redeem thee by His blood.*

*Joy, O joy, beyond all gladness,  
Christ hath done away with sadness!*

*Hence, all sorrow and repining,*

*For the Sun of Grace is shining!* (LSB #987, vs. 1-2)

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

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.