

5 December 2007
Advent 1 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Isaiah’s Vision of Advent: The Mountain of the Lord”

God doesn’t do things as we expect.

In fact, in the Church, what you see is rarely what you get.
For here, sinners are called saints, the least are the greatest, the weak are strong,
those the world considers cursed are called blessed, and the dead live.
He seems like a very confused and upside-down God.
But maybe it isn’t God who is confused and upside-down at all.
Maybe it is us.

God doesn’t do things as we expect, and that frustrates a lot of folks, who want a
nice, safe, predictable God.

A God who makes sense to me.
Who answers my prayers as I want and expect.
A tame God, who fits into my life and my plans.
No surprises, please.

God doesn’t do things as we expect.

And that’s why there’s Christmas.
For if you want to consider the most unexpected acts of God . . . becoming a man,
born of a virgin, and laid in a Bethlehem manger, must be one of them.
God in human flesh.
It’s just not what you expect an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God to do!
To become small and weak.

The Mount Sinai God, that we heard about in Hebrews – yes, *that’s* God, isn’t it!
The God we expect.

Holy and terrifying. Big. Demanding. Awesome. Loud.
On the Mountain of the Lord that we must some how, some way, ascend.
Either morally, or mystically, or intellectually.
We must overcome and rise to Him, to live with Him. To be with Him.
Climbing. Ascending. Struggling. Suffering.
Some how. Some way.

But no; God doesn't do things as we expect.

And so instead of man to the mountain, the Mountain comes to man.
For the Mountain of the Lord is no earthly mountain, as we think of them.
The Mountain of the Lord is the place where God dwells with His people.
And *that's* what makes it the greatest and highest of all mountains.
The presence of God for us.

For God is greatest for us when He made Himself the least.
He is highest for us when He made Himself the lowest.
He is most powerful for us when He hung powerless on the cross.

And so the Mountain of the Lord is in Bethlehem, where the Creator of all worlds
lies in this world as a baby in a manger, serenaded by angels who sing of the peace
He has come to bring to a confused and sin-filled world.

And the Mountain of the Lord is there that day by the well, speaking to a wounded,
rejected, confused, sin-filled woman in Samaria.
To lift her up and give her peace in the forgiveness of her sins.

And the Mountain of the Lord is here this day, speaking to a wounded, rejected,
confused, and sin-filled people, to give us peace in the forgiveness of our sins.

And this is the Mountain of the Lord that Isaiah saw and prophesied about.
The Lord who comes to dwell with His people, and bring peace for all in the
forgiveness of our sins.

That what separated us from God separate us no more.
That we have hope and a future, no matter who you are.
Whether a shepherd or a King.
Rich or poor. High or low. Man or woman. Young or old.
God Your Saviour is here for you.
A most unexpected delight.

And so Christmas means that we ascend the Mountain of the Lord in a most
unexpected way!
For we ascend not by climbing, but by falling on our knees.
In repentance and faith.
That our Lord who came down to us and was lifted up on the cross, *and then* lifted
up from death, *and then* lifted up in His ascension, would lift us also, up to

Himself, in Heaven.
And give us peace.

God doesn't do things as we expect.

And that is good!

And so when the *unexpected* comes upon you, whatever it may be, do not fear.

Your Lord is with you.

For He has claimed you as His own.

He has sprinkled you with His cleansing blood in Holy Baptism.

He feeds you with Himself in His Supper.

And He bids you hide yourself and take refuge in Him.

To trust not in the mountains of this world -

the wisdom,

the strength,

the philosophies of this world that promise so much and deliver so little.

No, Isaiah says.

There is another mountain. A new mountain. A surprising mountain.

That though it look little and weak, is the greatest and highest of the mountains.

For it is the Mountain of the Lord.

Here for you and for all nations, that all flow to Him in faith.

So come to Him who comes to you.

To Him who comes *for you*.

The One who doesn't do things as we expect.

And that's why there's Christmas.

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