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Advent 2 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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

Christmas trees come and Christmas trees go.

Live ones die.

Artificial ones last a little longer, but they wear out too.

And so it was with the tree of the Lord named Israel.

But it didn’t have to be.

God had so abundantly blessed her, protected her, provided for her, and sanctified her. Under King David, He had grown her into a “tree” of magnificent proportions. A place of safety and shelter, not only for her people, but also for the nations around them. The Temple fed and watered Israel so that she was lush and healthy, strong and secure. All by God’s grace. All His gift to her.

Until she chose to die.

To die by cutting off the source of her food and water – the Temple – and turning to other gods, other worship, other “truths.”

She started drying up.

Little by little, the leaves fell, the branches became dry twigs, and the healthy tree of Israel became sick unto death, with the cancer of idolatry.

God sent prophets to her.

Divine physicians, to diagnose Israel and warn her of her disease.

To proclaim the cure, and give them the medicine of the Lord’s Word.

Some listened.

Death was held off for a while.

But most turned a deaf ear and killed the messengers, so killing themselves.

And the once glorious, magnificent, royal, holy bride of Christ, His Israel, was chopped down.

To nothing but a stump.

But though His bride was unfaithful and adulterous, bloody and battered, the Lord would not give up on her.

He would never take back His wedding vow.

No, as He once, in grace, gave life to Israel, so He would do so again.

And so, Isaiah proclaims, *a shoot shall come forth from the stump*.
Life from the dead.
And the dying and decay of Israel would again become growth and fruitfulness.
And it would be even more glorious than before.
New branches would be grafted in.
Not only would it give shelter to the nations, but to all of creation.
There would be peace. True and lasting peace.
The peace of sins forgiven.

700 years after Isaiah spoke these words, this shoot came forth, as was foretold.
The kingdom would grow again.
Not a kingdom of this world, but a kingdom of *all* worlds. Of all people, times, and
places. Indeed, of all eternity.
A kingdom of justice and righteousness, Isaiah said.
“With a King who doesn’t give special preference to the wealthy and powerful.
A King who attends to the needs of the weak and lowly.
A King who punishes the wicked instead of consorting with them.” (Concordia Pulpit
Resources, Vol. 9, No. 1, p 19)
A King who would be a little child.
The Son of God born a son of man in Bethlehem.
To rule in love.
To lead us, to guide us, to save us.
To die for our sins, and then to rise to life again, to conquer death and give us life.
For where there is no sin there is no death.
And where there is no death there is only life.
Life eternal.

And this He did. How do we know?
Because, Isaiah said, *the resting place* of our King, of the shoot, is *glorious*.
Which is really an odd thing to say about ones “resting place” - or in other words,
his grave. Most graves I know of are *not* glorious at all. They’re places of sadness; of
the defeat of death.
But His grave is glorious . . . for one reason: because it is *empty*!
And the empty tomb shows us the glory of the Lord.
That He defeated sin.
That He defeated death.
That He defeated the devil - *for us*.
That we might live in hope and peace, and have the life our Lord always intended for

His people. Life in Him, under His care, both now and forever.

And so now, Isaiah says, *the root of Jesse is standing as a signal for the peoples.*
His cross and empty grave a beacon of light and hope in this dark world of sin and death.

A signal of truth.

A signal of God's faithfulness.

A signal of His love.

That He will never take back His wedding vow to you.

That while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The Bridegroom did not reject His sin-filled bride, but laid down His life for her.

For you.

And so we are reconciled to God.

And so it is **in Bethlehem**, the Tree of Life is planted again.

And the angels no longer guard its presence with flaming sword, but sing and proclaim its coming to all the world!

That we come, and eating His body and drinking His blood, we have life again.

That we be nourished and fed, and restored to Paradise.

And we are! Now. Just not yet in fullness.

Like the joy of Christmas - here already now, but not yet in fullness.

But that day is coming.

Because our Lord is coming.

Coming again, for you, to take you to be with Him in His Kingdom.

A Kingdom not of this world.

A Kingdom which has no end.

A Kingdom for you.

So come to Him who comes for you.

Who came once as a little child.

And is coming again, in glory, to give His glory to you.

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