

19 December 2007  
Advent 3 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

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

It may seem odd that I named this third vision of Isaiah “the *Sword* of the Lord” when the reading tonight from Isaiah did not mention a sword, but spoke of so many *good* things.

Of miracles, restoration, and peace.

Wonders that mark the Messiah’s coming.

*Exactly!*

Isaiah wants you to know: the sword of the Lord is not intended for you.

And so he says: “*Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.*”

And so the sword of the Lord comes,

to release creation from its misery, to strengthen weak hands,

to make firm feeble knees, to open the eyes of the blind,

to unstop the ears of the deaf, to make the lame leap like a deer,

that the mute sing for joy, and to ransom those captive to sin.

That we be captives no more.

Our exile in the valley of the shadow of death ended.

That we return to Zion with gladness and singing, and rejoice in the Lord.

So what is this “sword” of the Lord, that would come and do this?

Not a what, but a *who*.

It is His Word.

The Word *made flesh*, and lying in the manger.

The very Son of God.

Who comes not to destroy, but to serve.

Who comes not in a show of great might, but in weakness.

Who comes not arrayed in splendor, but wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Our Lord promised to “bear His right arm” and come and do something about our sin.

*And at Christmas, He did.*

What good news this is! For how unlike the vengeance we see in the world.  
Swords poised at us –  
the swords of greedy and bloodthirsty tyrants;  
the swords of those who slay reputations with their hurtful and malicious words;  
the swords of those who kill in the name of faith,  
thinking they are doing God a favor.  
Swords not only pointed *at* us, but often times also *by* us.  
To get what we want.  
To put down others that we may be exalted.  
Swords wielded in anger and bitterness; in selfishness and hatred.

How different the sword of the Lord! Wielded in love. Wielded to save.  
But this should not surprise us.  
That the way of a holy God should be so different from the ways of a sinful world.

And so God wields His sword – not to destroy us! – but to destroy whatever gets in  
the way of His restoring us and saving us.  
And so His sword is like an axe, chopping down our idols, that we trust in Him  
alone.  
His sword is like a surgeon's scalpel, skillfully cutting into our hard and sinful hearts,  
to remove our love of sin.  
His sword is like a machete, clearing away the obstacles of sin and worry and doubt  
and all that would separate us from Him.  
That we fix our eyes on Jesus.  
And see in Him our hope, our life, and our future.

But in order to destroy *everything* that gets in the way of saving us, the sword of the  
Lord, our Saviour, would have to destroy also **death**.  
And there's only one way to do that.  
From the inside out.  
To take our death-causing sins and put them upon Himself.  
To die the death those sins have earned, and then rise to life again.  
That death itself be dealt a mortal blow.  
The destroyer be destroyed.  
And we be set free. *Truly* free.  
From *all* our enemies – both of *this* world and life, and the next.  
And so have nothing to fear.

And so the sword of the Lord came, in Bethlehem.

Quietly. Gently. Humbly.

Just as Isaiah prophesied.

Or as we heard in the words of Zachariah in Luke:

*“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has visited and redeemed his people  
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David,  
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
that we should be saved from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us;  
to show the mercy promised to our fathers  
and to remember his holy covenant,  
the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us  
that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,  
might serve him without fear,  
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”*

And so we have reason to rejoice!

With Advent joy, in our Lord who has come to do this, and is still coming to us  
today.

Coming in the strength of His weakness;  
in the glory of His humility;  
and in the power of His forgiveness.

The ways of our holy God so unlike the ways of the world!

Which is good.

For look at what our ways have accomplished!

So come to Him who comes for you.

The Sword of God. The Lamb of God. The Son of God.

Come! *“Be strong; fear not! [For] Behold, your God [has] come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He [has] come and [has] save[d] you.”*

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