

25 December 2011
The Nativity of our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Marvel at this Word!”

Text: John 1:1-14; Exodus 40:17-21, 34-38; Titus 3:4-7

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

Christmas is a time of surprises. Perhaps you were surprised by a gift you opened this morning, perhaps by receiving a card or a greeting from someone you hadn't heard from in a long time. Or maybe this season it was an encouraging word or a helping hand when you needed it the most. Or, maybe you received an unwelcomed or sad surprise this season - those happen, too.

But today as we gather on the morning of our Lord's birth, we celebrate the greatest surprise of all. Oh, its no surprise to us - we've heard this story before, some of us for many decades. But maybe it *should* surprise us. Maybe we need to recapture some of the wonder of how amazing it is, what we heard today: that ***the Word became flesh.***

Imagine how wondrous that sounded to Adam and Eve! They had stepped in it big time! God's perfect and holy creation ruined by their own selfishness, greed, pride, doubt, and idolatry. They knew good *and* evil now, whereas before they had known only good. And how they wished they could put that devil back in the bottle. But it was too late. Now they were sinners. Now they were ashamed. Now they were separated from God and from each other. Now there was death. What had they done?!

But then God's Word came to them. Their Father still loved them and came looking for them. And He promised them a Saviour - that one day, the offspring of the woman would come and do to the serpent what the serpent had done to them. Had they known then what we know now, that this offspring would be the Son of God Himself, that the One speaking to them would come and be born of woman - ***the Word made flesh*** - had they known that I think they would have cried tears of joy. *Their sin would cause their loving, giving God to come in their flesh and be wounded for them.* He had given them so much and they had given Him sin in return! Would He now do this - *give Himself* - for them, too? How surprising and wonderful those words! Those words that we heard again today, *fulfilled: **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh!***

This year, let us marvel at those words again. We sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. We who know good and evil and far too often choose the evil rather than the good. We who receive only good from our Creator, our Father in heaven, and give Him sin in return. Sin because of *our own* selfishness, greed, pride, doubt, and idolatry. At least Adam and Eve were ashamed . . . are you? Maybe sometimes, huh? But other times, you'd do it again, wouldn't you? 'Cause it got results. It worked. You got what you wanted.

It's true. All true. And not a day goes by when that's not true. . . . So do you think God regrets it? The Word becoming flesh? Coming for you? Giving Himself for you?

Absolutely not! He would do it again in a heartbeat. Because that heart that beat in the manger so long ago, and now beats at the right hand of the Father, beats only for you. What the Father made in love He does not discard or disown. He loves you still and so He comes for you. *Of the Father's Love Begotten* (LSB #387).

We heard of that coming to be with us already in the Old Testament reading, when God came to be with His people as they wandered through the wilderness in the exodus. At that time, it wasn't in the flesh but in a cloud. A cloud would descend and fill the tabernacle ***with the glory of the Lord***, Moses said.

And then what did we hear this morning? ***And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory!*** The same glory of the Lord that descended to be with His people to lead them out of their slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land, has now come to provide for us a much more important and lasting exodus - *the exodus from our sin and death to the Promised Land of heaven.*

And so He came in the flesh - no cloud this time. For He came not just to *lead* us in this exodus, but *to take your place* in it - to take the place of the tabernacle sacrifices and offer Himself for the sin of the world on the cross. To die and then begin the great reversal: the dead come to life again, your shame covered in His love, your sin forgiven, and your separation from your Father healed. For in Jesus, God and man are literally brought together and made one again! *Forever.* For ***the Word became flesh.***

That God would do that for you, is that not a wonder? Or as we will sing later: *the wonder of His love* (LSB #387 v. 4).

And that He would do it again, how do I know this? Because He is still coming for you today. The Word who became flesh is flesh still and comes *to you, for you*, in that same body and blood today on this altar. And that final, dreadful part of the sentence once spoken to Adam has been reversed - and now the fruit of the Tree of

Life is ours again! And so while Adam ate and died, for you and me it has been proclaimed: the day you eat of this, you shall surely live! **This is My Body, this is My Blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sin.** And we feast upon the Lamb of God. The flesh and blood of our Lord is truly the first - and best - Christmas gift.

And so the darkness of our sin is enlightened by His glory. The glory of the Creator dying for his creatures. The glory of the strong become weak. The glory of God in the manger. The glory of Jesus. The glory of the Word made flesh. The glory of God who gives Himself to us. *Is this not a marvel?*

But perhaps there's even one more marvel for us this happy morning . . . that your Saviour didn't just redeem you from your sin that you may serve God as a slave, or be an indentured servant, or to be on parole to see if you'll live up to it - the Son of God came to make you a son of God. *A full son!* With all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto! For that's what His forgiveness does. It doesn't just restore *part* of the way, but *all* of the way.

For as St. John told us today, ***to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.***

Or as St. Paul put it: ***But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, - or, when the Word became flesh - he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, - because we don't do righteousness; we do sins - but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, - that is, Holy Baptism; and so the font is our manger! - whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs - or sons - according to the hope of eternal life.***

That John's version of the Christmas story. No angels, no journey to Bethlehem, no shepherds, no kings or wise men. For John, the Son of God made the journey down to us; He is both the Shepherd and the Lamb; He is the King of kings and the wisdom of God. Take everything else about Christmas away, and you still have that. Even if all the carols, the lights, the trees, and the gifts disappear, ***the Word became flesh.***

Today, marvel at that. Rejoice with the angels. Kneel with the shepherds. And take the body and blood of Jesus not in your arms, like Mary, but in your mouth, and depart in peace. Your sins are forgiven, dear child of God; your exodus complete.

For ***the Word became flesh.*** For you.

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.