

25 December 2012
The Nativity of our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“What Is God Saying Today?”

Text: Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-14; Isaiah 52:7-10

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

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son (Hebrews 1:1).

God has always spoken. In the beginning, He spoke and all creation came into being. When our first parents sinned, He came to them and spoke - to find them, to call them to repentance, and to promise them a Saviour. Through the ages, ***at many times and in many ways***, God spoke to the patriarchs and prophets - through visions, through dreams, through angels, through *theophanies* - or, appearing to them Himself. But now, the writer of Hebrews says, now something different, something new. God is speaking in a way He has never done before. ***But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.***

Think about that for a moment. God is now speaking to us by His Son, who as we remember today, as a baby in the manger, cannot speak! Yet He is speaking, isn't He? His very presence with us, speaking volumes of God's love for you and me. So today, as we celebrate with great joy the birth of Jesus, let us consider what God ***has spoken to us by his Son*** and His birth today. Today as we sing with the angels. Today as we wonder with the shepherds. Today as we take all these things and ponder them in our hearts with Mary.

First we heard from the prophet Isaiah that ***the Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations.*** What is God saying with those words? Well, you bare your arm when you get ready for work. You roll up your sleeves and get ready to get down and dirty. That is what God is now doing with the birth of His Son. He is now beginning the down and dirty work of our redemption. The down and dirty work of taking the sin of the world upon Himself and dying a bloody, messy death on the cross. And so Jesus will. He will begin this work by joining a bunch of sinners in baptism, He'll hang out in the houses of sinners and visit leper colonies, and then He'll bare His back to the whip and have those holy arms nailed to a cross. Taking your place. In every stage of life and death, taking your place. Joining you in your death so that you could join Him in His resurrection and life. *That's what the baby in the manger is speaking to us today.* For Jesus didn't just appear as

a full-sized human being. He could have; but He didn't. He came like us, through conception, growth in the womb, and birth as a baby. Just like us in every way. To be your true brother; to be your true Saviour. Not someone who dashed in for a moment and dashed out before He got too dirty. Not this one. He's here because He wants to be here **for you**. Even as a baby. Down and dirty - from dirty diapers to a dirty cross.

We also heard from John the Evangelist today, those words that have become so familiar to us: ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh.*** What is God saying with those amazing words? Well, that Jesus didn't just wear our human flesh, like a fleshly robe or a costume. Jesus wasn't God and man in the sense that He kept His divine part here and His human part here, so that the two wouldn't mix; so that God would stay God and man would stay man. No, John tells us, ***the Word became flesh.*** Jesus is God and man, now and forever. We can *talk* about Jesus' divine nature and His human nature, we can *distinguish* between the two, but they cannot and will not ever be separated. This is who Jesus is now. This is how much God loves you! He didn't just sympathize with us or empathize with us or come and visit us for a while - ***the Word became flesh.*** Totally committed and totally invested in you. Yes, sinful you, unloveable you, rebellious you. You who, again this year, like me, have separated yourself from God, by sin, by busyness, by indifference, by carelessness, by selfishness. Yet we who deserve nothing from God hear today these amazing words: ***the Word became flesh.*** *That's what the baby in the manger is speaking to us today.* That whoever you are, whatever you have done, the Son of God has joined Himself to you forever that He might join you to Himself forever.

And then the writer to the Hebrews told us this morning that Jesus ***is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.*** *What is God saying to us today with those words?* Well those words, maybe, at first, sounds like fancy theological talk, but what they mean is this: *if you want to know God, look at Jesus.* He is the exact imprint of the Father's nature. It's not that the Father is angry with you but Jesus leaps in the way and takes the bullet for you. It's not like that at all. The Father loves you, the Son loves you, and the Holy Spirit loves you. The Father wants to save you, the Son wants to save you, and the Holy Spirit wants to save you. And *what the baby in the manger is speaking to us today* is that love. God wants you to know Him as the God who becomes a baby for you, who lives for you, and who dies for you. He doesn't want you to try to figure out who He is by trying to ascend into heaven in your thoughts or dreams and know Him as the eternal, immortal, infinite Creator of the universe, without beginning or end or change - our minds can't handle that! Our minds quickly blow a gasket when we try to think of God before time and space and without beginning. *But still He wants you to know Him.* And so, He says, don't look up; don't look there; don't look into the unknown! Look to the manger, look to the cross. *That's your God, your God for*

you. *That's* how much He loves you. *That's* what will fill your heart with joy and faith and confidence. God became small for you. That you know Him. That you love Him.

But all this, all that the Son is speaking to us today - God bearing His arm, the Word becoming flesh, this baby in the manger being the exact imprint of the Father's nature - all this, most importantly for us, is to do this one thing, as the author to the Hebrews also wrote: ***to make purification for our sins.***

All of it would have been *true* - the angels, the journey to Bethlehem, the birth, more angels, the shepherds, the wise men - all of it would have *true*, but all of it would have been for *naught*, for nothing, had Jesus not made ***purification for our sins.*** For the sin that separates us from God is real and it would have separated us from God for eternity, if Jesus had not come to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

That's the light of which John spoke today when He said: ***In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*** The darkness keeps trying to overcome it though! Trying to get us to doubt forgiveness, forget about forgiveness, or disregard forgiveness. Trying to enshroud us and our world with unspeakable horrors and tragedies, and trying to dilute this true teaching of God with all the different religions and sects in our world today, teaching all kinds of things. Trying to hide God in the midst of a world of reason, a world of science, a world of common sense, a world of evolving knowledge. To, as the atheist association tried to sell this year: *Keep the Merry and Lose the Myth.*

Yet the light continues to shine in the darkness. The light of the forgiveness of Jesus continues to spread into the world. People are baptized, the Gospel is preached, forgiveness is proclaimed, the Body and Blood of Jesus received. *And the light scatters the darkness.* This child, whose birth we remember today; this God, whose love we remember today, did that. And is doing it still. That through this child of God we be children of God. That through this Son of man in the arms of His mother Mary, we be sons of God in the arms of our Father in heaven.

So *what the baby in the manger is speaking to us today* is this: I have come to forgive you. Not to ignore your sin, but to forgive your sin. Not to pretend that your sin is normal, but to die for your sin. Not to sweep your sin under the rug because you don't like to think about it, but to take your sin upon myself, that when this child becomes a man, the Son become the Lamb*, and your sin be atoned for and taken away from and not held against you.

That's what this day is all about. That's what Christmas is all about. The greatest gift

of all. Those words which sound so easy, but are so often the hardest to say. Those words that sound so easy, but for which the Word became flesh and the Son of God went to the cross. Those words from the mouth of God Himself: *I forgive you all your sins*. There is simply nothing greater that you could receive - or give! - for Christmas this year.

So come and receive that forgiveness. And rejoice! *For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord* (Luke 2:14).

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

* - *"the Son became the Lamb."* I do not mean this in any adoptionistic sense, but more in the understanding of His passive obedience on the cross.