

22 April 2012
Easter 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Easter Children”

Text: Luke 24:36-49 (1 John 3:1-7; Acts 3:11-21)

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] Alleluia!

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

The thinking of the world and the thinking of the church don't often agree, and it seems as if they are agreeing less and less these days, about all kinds of issues. But one thing we agree on is *that Easter is for children*. Yes, for children . . . we just disagree about who the children are! In the thinking of the world, Easter is for children because it's about candy and bunnies and egg hunts and things like that. But for the church, Easter is for children because Easter is about baptism, and baptism - no matter what age you are - is where we are born anew as children of God. St. Paul tells us in Romans (chapter 6) that baptism unites us to Jesus' death and resurrection - to Good Friday and to Easter - so that *dying with Him*, dying to sin, *we rise with Him*, to a new life of grace. A new life as children of God. And so as we heard from St. John today: ***“what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”*** And so we are. Children of God, loved by God.

But good parents don't just *have* children, they *raise* children. And so it is with our Father in heaven. And so these weeks following our celebration of Easter are about what our baptism means for us; how we *live* and *grow* as children of God. Last Sunday in the Introit, we sang: *“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation.”* Being a child of God is not the *end* of the story, but the *beginning*, of growing up to salvation; of growing in faith and love and righteousness; of not growing away from God - in independence, in freedom, in self-sufficiency - but rather into Him. To be like Him. Like Father, like son.

This Easter-growth began for the disciples that very first night of the resurrection. For as Luke tells us, they are gathered together, talking, and when Jesus appears to them they act, well, rather childish. Like the child who thinks there is a monster in the closet or under the bed, *they thought they saw a spirit; a ghost*. But just as flesh and blood parents embrace their children and drive away their fears, so Jesus here *in His flesh and blood* embraces His children - and bids them embrace Him - and

drives away their fears. He is no ghost, but the Son of God who has conquered death in His resurrection. But this His children need to learn, and their faith grow and cling to. And so Easter night, Jesus comes into their room and calms their fears. He is alive and with them, and so they have peace.

But what Jesus does next is just as important as this first giving of peace. Luke tells us: *“Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.”* Like the parent who after embracing her child opens the closet to show him that there are no monsters, or who kneels and shows her that there is nothing under the bed, so Jesus next opens the Scriptures to show His children the truth - the truth of His Word. That what happened the past few days was no accident, no series of unfortunate events, and not things spinning out of control - but what had been prophesied and spoken of from the beginning and all through the Scriptures. Everything that had been written, spoke of and pointed to Him and His Easter work.

And so Jesus opened the Scriptures to them and filled their minds with the truth. He told them about the cross and Isaac’s burden of wood in Genesis. He told them about His Supper and the flesh and blood of the passover lamb in Exodus. He told them about His atonement for sin and the sacrifices in Leviticus. He told them about His death for the life of the world, like it was with Joseph. He told them how He was the real strong man, like Samson, who came to crash the gates of his enemy. He told them about the hatred and villainy He and a former King of Israel - David - received, even from their own people. He told them about the being pierced from Zechariah as He showed them His hands and side. He told them how He was Isaiah’s Suffering Servant. He told them about dry bones and resurrection. And with each teaching, each story, each shadow revealed, their fears were taken away and their faith increased. The monsters of uncertainty and the ghosts of sin were taken away, and replaced with the Spirit and Word of God.

Oh, they were still children! They would always be children, just as we will always be. But they were learning as they drank *the pure spiritual milk of the Word*, and growing up to and into their salvation - which is not a *what*, but a *who*. Growing up and into Christ - the one who was speaking to them and not only *in*forming, but *forming*, them.

And that distinction is important. That the Word of God not only *informs* us, but also *forms* us. For being a child of God is not simply a matter of the head, but of the heart. Of life that is not just known, but lived. Perhaps we have too often put asunder these two things that God has joined together. The Word of God became flesh, and He still does, as He now comes and lives in and through us. That we live who we are; who we have been made in our baptism.

That is what John means when he goes on to talk about the *“practice of sinning”*

and the “*practice of righteousness.*” That is not simply a matter of *knowing* what is right and wrong, or of will power and determination to follow the Law. It is a matter of *being*, of *abiding* in Christ. That born anew as children of God, we no longer follow the false promises and lies of the devil, but instead, follow the true and sure promises of God, and find our life in Him. *Practicing righteousness* by repenting of our sin and abiding in His forgiveness and love, and thus growing into Him.

Do we always do that? You know that you don’t! We’re children, after all, and we often act like children. Being rebellious, wanting junk food instead of good food, thinking we know better than our Father, listening to and following other voices and so-called wisdom in this world. And what happens is that our **minds** get filled with all kinds of junk - truths, half-truths, falsehoods, superstitions, fantasies, myths, legends, theories, and all the latest fads and trends; and our **lives** get filled with all kinds of junk - sins, hurts, struggles, and wanderings - and we become such a mixed-up jumble that satan loves to manipulate, raising doubts, resurrecting fears, and putting monsters of uncertainty and skeletons of sin back in our closets and under our beds.

But we have a good and faithful Father, who sent His Son for us, and who has given us His Spirit - our triune God who has not left us on our own, but continues to come to us in the night of sin with the light of His grace, and give us what we need - **Himself!** Still chasing our monsters and forgiving our sins and giving us peace. He opens our minds to clean out the junk and fill them with His Word of truth. He opens our hearts to clean out the junk and fill them with His love. He opens our mouths and puts into them the good food that we need - His own body and blood, to feed and strengthen His children. That if we have acted in ignorance and unbelief, if we have rebelled and followed our own ways, if we have doubted and went along with the world, we be forgiven and do so no more!

For this Word Jesus not only gave His disciples that night and opened their minds so that they could understand, but sent them as His witnesses, ***that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations.*** And we heard Peter do that very thing in the readings from Acts, as he preached for the people to ***repent . . . and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.*** The very same Word and preaching that comes to us today as well.

But now mark well that word and what Peter said there - that our refreshing comes ***“from the presence of the Lord.”*** Or literally, from *“the face of the Lord.”* Or in other words, He doesn’t just send it from afar, He comes and brings it. He comes to you Himself. To embrace you, forgive you, heal you, baptize you, raise you, feed you, teach you, and keep you. He does this through His means - through His people and things; through the Ministry, the Word, and the Sacraments. But through

these people and things, it is no ghost, but your Lord Himself. The Good Shepherd caring for His sheep. The Father keeping His children. Our Saviour and brother with you still.

And so "*beloved,*" as St. John said, "*we are God's children now.*" His baptismal promise and faithfulness is sure. What He has given He will not take back. What He has done He will not undo. And what He has promised He will deliver. So do not fear, though what you will be has not yet appeared, when Christ appears, you will be like Him. Do not fear, for there is nothing in this world that your Saviour has not conquered. Do not fear, for there is no sin your Saviour will not forgive. Do not fear, for all has been fulfilled. Your Saviour comes to you now not to condemn, but that you grow in His Word; that you grow up in your salvation; that you grow into Him. That you *taste and see that the Lord is good.* And abide in Him who is alive for you.

For yes, dear baptized children of God, Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed!] And He is here for you. Alleluia!

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.