

December 2015
Advent 1 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“God’s Advents: In the Garden”

Text: Genesis 3:1-21; Galatians 3:23-29; John 19:23-27

Where are you?

Oh, their Father knew where they were. That they were hiding from Him. He who gave them life, and a perfect home, and had given them each other - they were now afraid of Him. How distant the memory of the joy they had when He had presented Eve to Adam for his wife. Now, fear had replaced joy, shame had replaced love, and separation had replaced their most intimate fellowship. In a moment, everything . . . everything had changed.

They tried to cover themselves and their sin with fig leaves sewed together. How pathetic. It would be a losing battle. Leaves picked from branches quickly dry up and crumble. Even Eden fig leaves. So it would be a never-ending battle to cover themselves. And even if they could cover themselves on the outside, still their hearts were exposed. And how could they cover them and that shame? They tried blame. That was pathetic too . . . and didn’t work.

Where are you? What a thunderbolt of fear those words struck in the hearts of God’s children on that sad day. That day of sin and darkness and death, when their Father *advented*, came, to them.

But perhaps those words were not such bad news at all. Sinful humans heard them that way, but did God speak them that way? Maybe they are, in fact, good news for sinful human beings. Good news that instead of leaving us to ourselves, leaving us to our sin, and leaving us to death forever; instead of leaving us there hiding, divided, fearful, and always wondering when the shoe was going to drop - *God came, and God spoke*. Our Father came to us and did not curse or condemn His children. No, He promised to undo what they did; to do to the serpent what the serpent had done to them. And then He clothed them. *Real* clothes. Of skins. From an animal that died to cover them. And the death they felt inside of them they saw outside of them for the first time. And how horrid it must have looked. Seeing that animal once filled with life, lying dead, because of them.

Where are you? Truth is, we’re often in the same place as Adam and Eve, aren’t we? Trying to hide our sin, cover our shame, and blame others for our shortcomings and failures. Making excuses, denying, or maybe worst of all, not even feeling our sin anymore, in hearts grown calloused and hard . . .

And then one day God came and said not *where are you?* but *here I am*. Here to fulfill my promise, to be the promised offspring of the woman. To deal with serpent, to deal with sin, to deal with death. To deal with your shame and cover it, that you need hide no more. And God was born of a virgin, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger.

And so instead of stringing up Adam and Eve on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil - *which they deserved* - the Son of God was Himself hung naked and exposed on the cross - a tree with no leaves to hide behind. And His clothes - the soldiers took them and divided them up, payment for their days work. And so there hangs the second, perfect Adam, in place of the first, sinful Adam, taking the death and condemnation and curse that He, and us, and all the world deserve, that it be over and done . . . and we need hide in fear no more.

The apostle Paul said it this way tonight, explaining this wonderful truth to the Galatians, saying: *As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*. Baptism clothes us with Christ, inside and out. We don't need fig leaves or animal skins to cover our sin and shame - we have Christ. Jesus is the One who exposed Himself to cover our sin and shame, His blood atoning for it and washing us clean. And in so doing, Paul also says, He has brought back together what sin had separated: *you are all one in Christ Jesus*. Our fellowship with God and with one another is restored in Him.

Which means that now, because of Jesus, instead of hiding *from* God, we hide *in* Him. Though our sinful nature still wants to hide and blame, and satan is always whispering to us that that is the way to deal with our sin, Advent says no. Instead repent, and hide in Christ. Cover your sin in His forgiveness. Hide your death in His death. Everything else, any other way we try to deal with sin, is just fig leaves. And sooner or later, the fig leaves crumble and die, and leave us exposed again.

But our adventing, coming, God does not crumble, and Jesus died to defeat death. So a better way He has. An everlasting way.

So as we prepare for Jesus' second coming this Advent season, we do so by remembering his first, and that His birth in Bethlehem was God's *here I am*. That He is Immanuel - God with us. That we not be afraid and never have to wonder what God is going to say or what He's going to do. We know. Jesus showed us. His birth, His life, His death, His resurrection, all testimony to the heart of our God. And His Words that He commanded spoken now - I baptize you, I forgive you, I feed you - testimony that He is here for us still, with the mercy we need. *Here I still am*, for you.

And maybe this too. That with this confidence, we cover each others sins with Christ. That we be slow to condemn and quick to forgive. That our words be loving, not harsh.

That covered with Christ others see Christ in us. And so fill our families, friendships, and world with the mercy of our adventing God.

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