

9 December 2015  
Advent 2 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Greenspring Village, Springfield, VA

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“God’s Advents: On Mt. Sinai”

Text: Exodus 20:18-21; Hebrews 12:18-24; Matthew 27:45-54

God’s advents. That’s the theme of our midweek services this year. And so last week, we began with one of God’s first advents, one of His first comings, when He came to our first parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden, after they had plunged themselves and all creation into sin. Because of that, they hid. They hid from each other, but even more sadly, they hid from their Father. Their love had turned to fear. The light had turned to darkness.

Tonight we’re at Mt. Sinai. And the darkness and fear and hiding continue.

God had just brought the people out of Egypt, out from 400 years of slavery. He had done awesome things for them against the Egyptians. There was no doubting that this God who had brought such devastating plagues upon Egypt and who then divided the Red Sea, could do anything He wanted. There were no bounds to His power and might.

So when God comes down upon Mt. Sinai, the God of the Exodus, with thick darkness, with thunder and flashes of lightning, with the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking . . . in the face of such an awesome show of power, the people tremble in fear. It is the same fear felt by Adam and Eve so long ago and that caused them to hide. For God had just given His Law to the people, and their sin was exposed. Their hearts were laid bare. They wanted to hide. And so they begged Moses: You go talk to God. ***But do not let God speak to us, lest we die.*** They knew that a sinful people could not stand in the presence of a holy God.

Such fear is rare these days, in a world where sin is belittled, accepted, and more and more even flaunted. Even among us, among Christians, how often is our sin and rebellion shrugged off with a casual: *Well, it’s okay; I’m forgiven.* Tell that to the God of Mt. Sinai. Sin is not okay. Our gossip is not okay. Our rebellion is not okay. Our selfishness is not okay. Our failure to love and help and care is not okay. Our evil thoughts and desires, enacted or not, are not okay. Our words that hurt and cut are not okay. And if we think: *It’s okay; I’m forgiven . . .* we are neither fearing nor loving God. And we don’t really understand how serious, how deadly, our sin is.

But that’s why God cares so much. He knows how serious, how deadly, sin is. And so He came down onto Mt. Sinai with the Word of the Law and with such an awesome display

of power, so that, as Moses told the people, ***the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.***

But thankfully, that fearful show of power and the speaking of the Law is not the final word from God to us. That is not all we know of God. Matthew painted a rather Sinai-esque picture in the words we heard from him tonight, from when Jesus was upon the cross, with the full weight of God's wrath against sin upon Him. All the awesome power once unleashed upon Egypt now unleashed upon Jesus, the Lamb of God bearing all the sin we take so lightly. It is not so light on Him who hangs in the darkness. It is not so light on Him who cries out ***My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*** It is not so light when upon His death nature trembles.

And so awesome was all of that, that upon seeing it, even a Roman centurion figures it out. ***Truly this was the Son of God!***

But while He is right, He is also not quite right. He made one mistake. He should have said not *was*, but *is*. This is the Son of God. For while He ***cried out with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit*** in death, death will not have the victory. He will rise from the dust of death, from the darkness of the tomb. He would not come down from the cross to save Himself; He would stay to save you. He would stay until every last bit of awesome wrath against your sin was given to Him. That there be none left for you. And so after a Sabbath rest in the tomb, He comes, He advents, back to life again.

And that is why the writer of Hebrews could say that Mt. Sinai is now in the rearview mirror. That is not where you have come - ***to the blazing fire and darkness and gloom and tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.*** No, he says, you have come to something much different. Not to Mt. Sinai, but ***to Mount Zion, the city of the living God.*** You have come to the light, the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. You have come ***to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood*** - His blood - ***that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*** For Jesus' blood cries out not for vengeance, but for forgiveness. It cries out for you. Now, and on the Last Day.

And so we need not hide. We need not hide ourselves or our sin behind belittling it, excusing it, or denying it. To do so is also to deny the cross. Instead, by repenting and confessing our sin, in all its ugliness and shame, we hear that better word from Jesus - that word of absolution: *I forgive you.* And you really are. No more wrath of God left for you. Only love and light and life with Jesus, your Saviour.

Which is why I often tell folks that it is good that God knows every sin you've ever done. Every sinful thought, every dirty and shameful desire, every harsh and critical word, and every hurtful and rebellious deed - He knows them all, and it's good that He does. Which seems counter-intuitive, to us who keep trying to hide our sin and shame. But if God did

not know all your sin, if there were one or two you could manage to hide from Him, you could never be sure that all your sin was on Jesus and atoned for. Maybe that one or two weren't. And for that one or two there would still be the wrath of God against you and the condemnation of God for you. But if He knows them all, then you can be sure that Jesus atoned for them all - every single one. And you are free.

So in just a couple of weeks we'll celebrate the birth of this Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The Son of God who hides Himself and His awesome power and glory in the weakness of human flesh, that we not fear Him, as they did on Mt. Sinai, but like the shepherds and the wise men, draw near to Him in faith. And wonder at the love of God who would do this for us.

And just maybe, then, that His love would have its way with us, and we show this same love to others.

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