

25 December 2015
The Nativity of Our Lord

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Vienna, VA

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“God’s Advents: In the Flesh”

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

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

This Advent season now past, in our midweek services we’ve considered “God’s Advents” - some of the ways and times that God came to His people. And in doing so, we noticed a common theme. When God came to Adam and Eve in the Garden after they had fallen into sin, when God came to His people on Mt. Sinai after He brought them out of Egypt in the Exodus, and when God will come again on the Last Day - each time, there is fear and the desire to hide from God. For sinful people cannot stand in the presence of a holy and sinless God. That is the sad reality of sin and the separation it has caused between the Creator and His creatures; between the Father and His children.

But last night and today, as we celebrate the Nativity of our Lord, we hear of something completely different - it is no longer *people* hiding . . . **God is hiding**. Hiding in human flesh and bone. Hiding in the infant, born of Mary, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger. Or to use John’s words which we heard this morning: *The Word* - that was in the beginning, was with God, and was God - *became flesh and made his dwelling among us*.

Yet equally as important as the fact that God is present and hiding in the infant whose birth we celebrate this day is *to know why* He is so hiding. We hide because of fear, anger, shame, or maybe just the desire to be alone. Our hiding is to separate ourselves from others. But not God. Again, with Him, it is completely different and exactly the opposite. He hides in love and mercy. He hides to reveal His glory (John 1:14). He hides *in order to be with us* as our Saviour, and so that *we may be with Him* as those redeemed and saved . . . and be no longer afraid.

And so today, as Isaiah said (v. 7), today is the proclamation of *good news*, of *peace*, of *good tidings*, and of *salvation*. That today, the Lord has *laid bare his holy arm* (v. 10). He has rolled up his sleeves, so to speak, baring his arm, to get to work - the work of our salvation. And what do we see when God reveals His muscle and gets to work? **A baby**. And we are reminded once again that God does not do as we do nor think as we think. Today, *your God reigns* (v. 8) from a manger. And we *burst into songs of joy together* (v. 9).

For as we heard today from the book of Hebrews: ***In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days - today! - he has spoken to us by his Son.*** And has God ever spoken so loudly as He did that Silent Night, when Christ the Savior was born? Has God ever spoken so loudly how much we need not fear, but how much He loves us, the lengths He would go for us, all that He would do for us?

So He comes, ***into the darkness***, John says. To be a light for us in the darkness. Or as the psalmist put it: *Your Word is a lamp for my feet, and a light for my path* (Ps 119:105). That's the Word of God spoken through the prophets, yes; but even more, the word of the prophets fulfilled by ***the Word made flesh***. For all the prophets spoke pointed to Him, and now He is showing us the way. For ***in these last days, [God] has spoken to us by his Son.*** He is now showing us the way, lighting the way, to life; life now and life forever.

And that way is not a way of greatness and power, but of lowliness, weakness, and humility. Of Bethlehem, manglers, and shepherds. And ultimately, of persecution, cross, and death. Again, not as we would do nor as we think, but the way of God. And so the way to life is as John said: *by faith*. That ***to all who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.***

Now, that's not the best wording, the best translation, for us today, to say that we have been given ***the right to become children of God***. Because that word - *the right* - is a loaded word for us today, in our society where my rights and equal rights and civil rights and the Bill of Rights are buzz words and the cause celebre. And so using that word here in translation almost makes it sound like we can demand something from God, that He owes us something. We have rights! And we have the right to be Your children God! Just like we have the right to free speech, the right to bear arms, the right to be whoever we want to be.

But that's the darkness we live in - the darkness that we're something and can demand something from God. But Adam and Eve, the people on Mt. Sinai, and the people on the Last Day, all those we've heard of this Advent season - they know better. They don't demand anything of God, they hide in fear. They know the only right they have is for punishment, condemnation, and death. Because of sin; their sin. And us too.

So sometimes that word is translated as *power* - that ***he gave us the power to become children of God***. But that, too, is misleading, sounding like we have the power to make ourselves God's children. But as anyone can tell you, a child doesn't make itself anything. It is made in its mother's womb and then born into the world quite from its own power or desire.

And so a better translation of that verse today would be this: that *to all who believe in his name, he gave to them the privilege to be children of God*. That puts the emphasis in the right place. For put that way, you see what God has given *as pure gift*; completely undeserved. It is a gift that the Father sent His Son to be born a son of man, that we might be born sons of God. A gift that in Jesus, we be taken from the darkness of sin to the light of love; from the darkness of death to the light of life; from the darkness of hell to the light of heaven.

That's what Jesus has done for us! That is why He is born. To endure the darkness of our sin and death and hell in our place on the cross, that we rise with Him to a new life - a life of light. A life we do not in any way deserve, but is the gift of God - His Christmas gift, to us. A gift that gives us joy and hope and peace in Him. And a gift that if it gives us any rights or power at all, gives us the same rights and power that we see in Christ - the power to fear not, but to trust, to believe His promises, to be lowly and lay down our lives for others, to humbly forgive and serve and love.

Which is exactly the gift we need. Those things sin has robbed from us, but are now restored to us in Christ. Gift from Him. It is the gift Mary and Joseph received, the gift the shepherds and wise men received, the gift the lowly and sinners and outcasts received, and the gift you have received. The gift of being a child of God in Jesus. And as Linus would say: *That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown*.

And that flesh and blood of Jesus that we remember this day was born for us, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger . . . that same body and blood is now given to you, here, wrapped in bread and wine and laid into your mouths. More gift. That your sin be forgiven and your death be overcome, even now. That though you sin, you need not fear, but rejoice in His forgiveness. And that though your life here on earth end, you not really die, but instead begin living your eternal life, your heavenly life, the life that has no end. That, too, your Saviour's gift to you.

That's the good news for us today; the good news of God in the flesh for you. The greatest wrapping job of all time, with the greatest gift as well. So rightly we will sing a new song today: *Joy to the World, the Lord has come* (LSB #387)! And rejoice we will. In the joy that He has come. The joy of His forgiveness. The joy of His gifts. And the joy that in Him, we need hide no more.

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