

25 December 2020
Christmas Day

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Light that Cannot Be Overcome”

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

These are **familiar** words that we just heard.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . .
. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as
of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

These are **precious** words.

Words that teach us who Jesus really is - no mere baby and no mere man, but the Almighty, All-knowing, Eternal, Creator God in the flesh. And not just any flesh - our flesh. God become one of us, to save us all.

These are **important** words.

For as John will say later in His Gospel, there is no other one by which we can be saved. No mere man can save himself, and there is no other God. Only *this* God, this God-made-flesh for us, to die for us, to die for our sins, can save us from sin and death and give us what only He *is* and *has* - eternal life.

So these are the **most important** words in all the world. That all need to hear. That God *wants* all to hear. That all believe in this Saviour come to us and through that faith become children of God. Children *born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

So the Christmas story is not just the story of Jesus' birth, but of *our* birth - that the Son of God was born a son of man, that we sons of men might be born again as children of God. And so it is a story that takes place not just in Bethlehem, but here, and wherever this word is proclaimed and believed. This Word of God through which the Holy Spirit worked and conceived Jesus in the womb of Mary, and the Word of God through which the Holy Spirit works now to conceive faith in our hearts. The faith of children of God.

So within these words so familiar, so precious, and so important, are other words . . . that maybe get glossed over because of the magnitude of these others. The words about John, who came as a witness. But John is important, because if Jesus was born, lived, died, rose, and ascended, but no one knew about it, it would all be in vain. It would be like

Christmas morning with all the gifts under the tree, wrapped just right, but no one opens them. The gifts there, but not received. So, too, an unproclaimed Jesus. Come as God's gift, but not received.

Which is, in fact, what we heard from John this morning. Jesus, the Word made flesh, *was in the world*, this *world made through Him*, His creation, yet *the world did not know Him*. *He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him*.

We need not ask why. We know why. The darkness and blindness of sin. Sin which has devastated us and our world more than we can fathom. It's what we're used to. It's all we know. And so it seems normal, even right. But it's anything but. And it's done such a number on us that many look at creation and see not a Creator but an accident that just happened. That many think what God calls good is not good, what God call right is wrong, and what God calls wrong is right. That we fight for and hold onto what doesn't last, and we let go what does. And that now has many even believing that death is just a part of life. Which is just crazy.

And so the one in whom is perfection and life came into this world of sin and death. To shine the light of God's love and forgiveness in this dark, unloving, unforgiving place. And John was sent *to bear witness about this light, that all might believe*. Which is strange, for you usually don't need someone to tell you about light - you see it. It's what *enables* you to see. Except if you're blind. Then light doesn't help you at all. And sin has blinded us.

So John speaks. Bears witness. Words that enter not the eyes but the ears. That we believe what we cannot see. That this baby that looks like any other baby is not like any other, but is the Son of God. That this man that looks like any other man is not like any other, but is the promised Saviour. That this condemned and dead criminal on a cross that looks like any other condemned criminal dead on a cross is not like any other, but the one who was condemned and died **for you**. That you live. And that while it looked like the darkness overcame the light when Jesus died on the cross, it did not. John was right. *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it*. Jesus' resurrection conquered death and the darkness once and for all.

And so in Jesus, the darkness cannot overcome you either. Maybe at times it feels like it is, looks like it is, seems like it is. But believe the word that enters not the eyes but the ears. The Word that spoke in the beginning and all things came into being. The Word that became flesh and dwelt among us. And the Word that still speaks to you today, making you children of God. A gift that not even death can take away. Even then, the darkness of the grave will not overcome you - you who are in the light.

John speaks this word. Bears witness. The word for that actually is *martureo* - John martyrs it. Or becomes a martyr for it. For the darkness hates this Word that defeats it,

and rages against it. And so it attacks John and kills him. But because of Jesus, with each attack and each death, the darkness doesn't deepen, but actually becomes less. The darkness cannot destroy the Church of Christ, but is only hastening its own end. Each martyr another light of truth in the darkness.

Which you are as well. When you answer hate with love, sin with forgiveness, hurt with kindness, evil with good, wrong with right, lies with truth. When all this comes upon you, the darkness is not overcoming, not winning - the darkness cannot overcome the light. The light of Christ that lives in you. And so each of you, too, a *martureo* - a witness to the light.

And so each of you *beautiful* - reflecting the beauty of Christ and His love and forgiveness. That's what Isaiah said today:

*How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him who brings good news,
who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,
who publishes salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns.*

And what better news than the news we proclaim today! The good news that yes, our God reigns. Not just far, far away in heaven, or a long, long time ago in Bethlehem. But here. Now. For all people. For His love and forgiveness is here for all people. Here for you. Here in the Word, the good news, proclaimed. Here in the washing and forgiveness of Baptism. Here in the life and salvation given us in the Body and Blood of Jesus in the Supper. Yes, here, our God reigns against all the raging of the darkness, sin, and death. And *the darkness cannot overcome Him*.

And so as we also heard from the book of Hebrews this happy morning: *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*. His Son speaking to you words of life and love. And you need no others. All you need is in this Word. For if you have this, you have Him. And if you have Him, you have life. No matter what else you have - or not! - in this world, no matter how much or how little, how high or how low you are, you have the greatest gift of all.

So I made it through this Christmas sermon without mentioning Covid! Oops. Well, almost. But really, it's just one more thing the darkness is using to try to overcome the light - but it won't. It can't. And whatever else comes next, it won't. It can't. Because today the light has come into the darkness. The light shines in the darkness. And we rejoice. *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us*. And we see His glory. And will see it forever. So really and truly, *Joy to the World!*

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