

25 December 2009
Christmas Day

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Grace upon Grace”
Text: John 1:1-18

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

Christmas is a season of hope, but not always good hope. Because for many people, Christmas is a season of uncertain, wishful hope. The hope of receiving a wonderful gift. The hope of a better year. The hope of peace and joy. And for some, those hopes are fulfilled, and the cycle starts again with new hopes, bigger hopes. But for others, their hopes are not fulfilled, and Christmas becomes a season of disappointment; of hopes dashed. But for both, when Christmas is over, Christmas is over. It is a day, perhaps a season, but nothing else.

How sad.

For today, John told us of a different hope. Not an uncertain, wishful hope - which we may or may not get; which may or may not come true - but a sure and certain hope. A confident hope. For it is a hope based on the promise of God - the promise He fulfilled for us this day. His promise to give us hope not just for a day or a season, but for all our lives. For today, John told us: ***“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.”***

But I ask you today: *why* is that verse good news? *Why* does that verse give us a sure and certain hope? The key is not just that ***the Word became flesh and dwelt among us***, but that He came and dwelt among us ***full of grace and truth***. Or another way to say that would be: He came and dwelt among us, *for you*. To live for you, to fight for you, to die for you, to rise for you, to be with you, to forgive you. For that is grace: it is His divine *for you*. Without that, we are reduced to *hoping* that He came to do something for me, hoping that He will help me, hoping that maybe God will toss me a few crumbs. But without His grace and promise, even of that we cannot be sure. But if He comes in grace, He comes *for you*, to save you. Surely and truly.

Grace is the key.

For if John had said only that ***the Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of truth***, that would *not* be good news. That would make Jesus just another Moses. For Moses, John also says, brought truth. He brought the Law, and every word of it is true.

This is what you are to do; this is what you are not to do.

Do all these things and you shall live; don't do these things and you shall die.

That's the truth, but it brings no hope, only the certainty of our sin and death.

For in truth, you have done what you should not do, and you have not done what you should do.

You have lived as if God did not matter, and as if you mattered most.

You love what is not of God, you desire what is not from Him, you doubt His will and His ways and His goodness.

And so your worship and prayers have faltered, and your thoughts, words, deeds, and desires have been soiled with sin. That is the truth which the Moses and the Law shows us. A shameful and frightening truth.

But, John tells us today, Jesus comes with another kind of truth - the truth of God and His grace. His grace, which is not about what you must do, but what God has come to do *for you*, in this one born today. For in Jesus, God is not only with you, but *for you*. And not just on your side, but even more than that. The Word, the Son of God, became flesh, to join you in your sin and shame, to join you in your weakness and fear, to join you in your death, **that what you are He may take, and what you are not He may provide.**

And so He takes your sin and gives you forgiveness.

He takes your weakness and gives you His strength.

He takes your shame and gives you honor.

He takes your doubt and gives you faith.

He takes your death and gives you life.

Do you doubt that He has done this? Look at the cross and see. There is your sin, there is your shame, there is your death. And if it is on Him, then it is not on you. And what you have received is, as John said, ***grace upon grace***. For truly and surely He has done this, and done it all for you. That you have the sure and certain hope of life. A hope that lasts not just a day or a season, but a lifetime, and even more.

And so today we not only remember the birth of Jesus, but in His birth see our own. That in Him we too are born again as children of God; ***born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. . . . Grace upon grace.***

And today we gather not only to remember this good news, but to receive it. To eat the very same body and drink the very same blood that laid in the manger for you, that hung on the cross for you. For the Son of God has taken your flesh and blood into His divinity, and now gives it back to you, to sanctify and cleanse you, to bless

and keep you, to forgive and strengthen you. And so today you will hear: take and eat, the body of Christ, *for you*; take and drink, the blood of Christ *for you*. **Grace upon grace.**

And today, we will go out with this good news, that God is not angry with us, but is one with us! That even if you're on Santa's naughty list, or the world's naughty list, you're not on God's naughty list. No, for you are in Jesus and He is in you. Your sin is forgiven. The list your name is on is called the Book of Life, and it's written there in Jesus' blood. And so as the angels sang at Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, so now they sing and rejoice over you - over one sinner who repents and is joined with Christ. **Grace upon grace.**

This is the grace and truth of Christmas, of Christ, born for you this day. In Him is hope for the hopeless, love for the loveless, and peace for the troubled. Be not fooled by His humble appearance, *nor by yours*. For as He is truly the Son of God in human flesh, so truly are you a son of God, though in frail, frightened, stumbling human flesh. And as truly as He is risen from the dead, so have you risen from the death of your sin, and will you rise on the last day. And as truly as He lives and reigns to all eternity, so will you with Him. **Grace upon grace.**

That is the hope of Christmas. A hope sure and true. A hope that cannot be taken away from you. A hope not of the Law, based on performance; but a hope of the Gospel, based on Christ. And so it is *for you*. For Christ is *for you*. *For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.* (Luke 2:11)

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.